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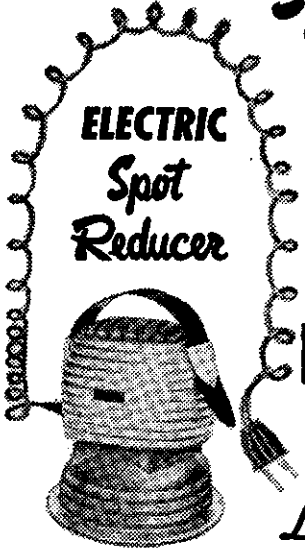
Reducing Specialist Says:

LOSE WEIGHT Where It Shows Most REDUCE MOST ANY PART OF THE BODY WITH

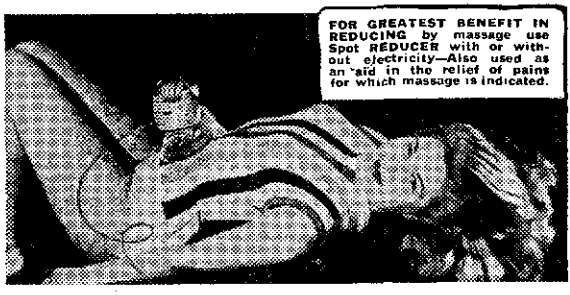
UNDERWRITERS LABORATORY APPROVED

Spot Reducer

Relaxing • Soothing
Penetrating Massage



PLUG IN—
GRASP
HANDLE
AND
APPLY



FOR GREATEST BENEFIT IN REDUCING by massage use Spot REDUCER with or without electricity—Also used as an aid in the relief of pains for which massage is indicated.

TAKE OFF EXCESS WEIGHT!

Don't Stay FAT—You Can Lose POUNDS and INCHES SAFELY

Without Risking HEALTH

Take pounds off — keep slim and trim with Spot Reducer! Remarkable new invention which uses one of the most effective reducing methods employed by masseurs and turkish baths—MASSAGE!

LIKE a magic wand, the "Spot Reducer" obeys your every wish. Most any part of your body where it is loose and flabby, wherever you have extra weight and inches, the "Spot Reducer" can aid you in acquiring a youthful, slender and graceful figure. The beauty of this scientifically designed Reducer is that the method is so simple and easy, the results quick, sure and harmless. No exercise or strict diets. No steambaths, drugs or laxatives.

With the SPOT REDUCER you can now enjoy the benefits of RELAXING, SOOTHING massage in the privacy of your own home! Simple to use—just plug in, grasp handle and apply over most any part of the body—stomach, hips, chest, neck, thighs, arms, buttocks, etc. The relaxing, soothing massage breaks down FATTY TISSUES, tones the muscles and flesh, and the increased awakened blood circulation carries away waste fat—helps you regain and keep a firmer and more GRACEFUL FIGURE!

Your Own Private Masseur at Home

When you use the Spot Reducer, it's almost like having your own private masseur at home. It's fun reducing this way! It not only helps you reduce and keep slim—but also aids in the relief of those types of aches and pains—and tired nerves that can be helped by massage! The Spot Reducer is handsomely made of light weight aluminum and rubber and truly a beautiful invention you will be thankful you own. AC 110 volts. Underwriters laboratory approved.

TRY THE SPOT REDUCER 10 DAYS FREE IN YOUR OWN HOME!

Mail this coupon with only $1 for your Spot Reducer on approval. Pay postman $8.95 plus delivery—or send $9.95 (full price) and we ship postage prepaid. Use it for ten days in your own home. Then if not delighted return Spot Reducer for full purchase price refund. Don't delay! You have nothing to lose—except ugly, embarrassing, undesirable pounds of FAT. MAIL COUPON now!

MAIL THIS 10 DAY FREE TRIAL COUPON NOW!

SENT ON APPROVAL—MAIL COUPON NOW!

SPOT REDUCER CO., Dept. E-985
1025 Broad St., Newark, New Jersey

Please send me the Spot Reducer for 10 days trial period. I enclose $1. Upon arrival I will pay postman only $8.95 plus postage and handling. If not delighted I may return SPOT REDUCER within 10 days for prompt refund of full purchase price.

Name .....

Address .....

City ..... *State*.....

☐ SAVE POSTAGE — check here if you enclose $9.95 with coupon. We pay all postage and handling charges. Same money back guarantee applies.

LOSE WEIGHT OR NO CHARGE

ALSO USE IT FOR ACHES AND PAINS

CAN'T SLEEP

Relax with electric Spot Reducer See how soothing its gentle massage can be. Helps you sleep when massage can be of benefit.

MUSCULAR ACHES:

A handy helper for transient relief of discomforts that can be aided by gentle, relaxing massage.

LOSE WEIGHT OR NO CHARGE

USED BY EXPERTS

Thousands have lost weight this way—in hips, abdomen, legs, arms, necks, buttocks, etc. The same method used by stage, screen and radio personalities and leading reducing salons. The Spot Reducer can be used in your spare time, in the privacy of your own room.

ORDER IT TODAY

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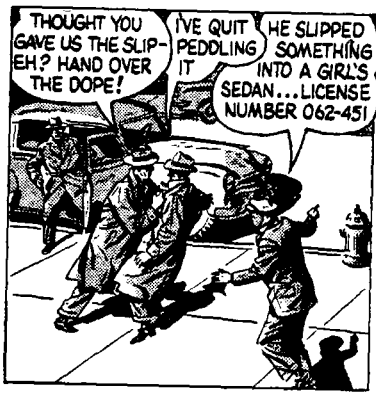
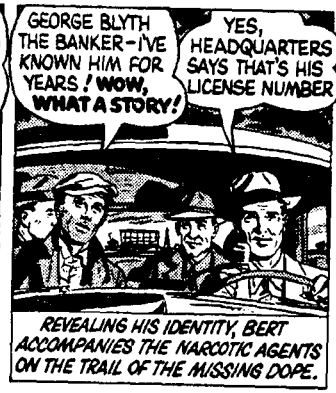
REPORTER'S HUNCH PAYS OFF TWO WAYS...

MASQUERADING AS A "SKID ROW" CHARACTER TO GATHER FEATURE MATERIAL FOR HIS NEWSPAPER, BERT EVENS, FAMOUS REPORTER, WITNESSES A PECULIAR HAPPENING...

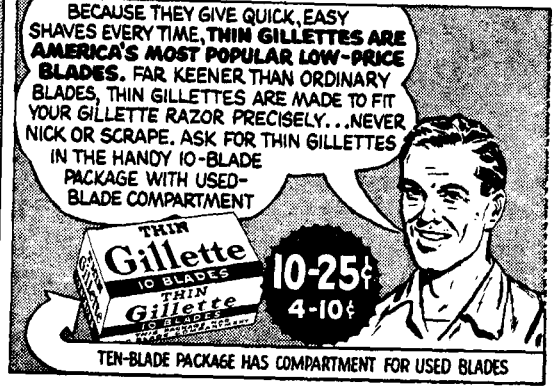

THOUGHT YOU GAVE US THE SLIP-EH? HAND OVER THE DOPE!
I'VE QUIT PEDDLING IT
HE SLIPPED SOMETHING INTO A GIRL'S SEDAN...LICENSE NUMBER 062-451



REVEALING HIS IDENTITY, BERT ACCOMPANIES THE NARCOTIC AGENTS ON THE TRAIL OF THE MISSING DOPE.

MY PAPER WANTS MISS BLYTH'S PICTURE. MAY I DROP IT OFF AND SEE YOU AT HEADQUARTERS?
OKAY, BUT HURRY. WE NEED YOUR STATEMENT TO CLEAR MISS BLYTH

MAY I RETURN YOUR PICTURE TOMORROW, MISS BLYTH?
PLEASE DO?
HE'S HANDSOME
CAN'T YOU MAKE IT AROUND SIX AND DINE WITH US?
NARCOTIC BUREAU
ONE HOUR LATER...


BECAUSE THEY GIVE QUICK, EASY SHAVES EVERY TIME, THIN GILLETTES ARE AMERICA'S MOST POPULAR LOW-PRICE BLADES. FAR KEENER THAN ORDINARY BLADES, THIN GILLETTES ARE MADE TO FIT YOUR GILLETTE RAZOR PRECISELY...NEVER NICK OR SCRAPE. ASK FOR THIN GILLETTES IN THE HANDY 10-BLADE PACKAGE WITH USED-BLADE COMPARTMENT
THIN Gillette 10 BLADES
10-25¢
4-10¢
TEN-BLADE PACKAGE HAS COMPARTMENT FOR USED BLADES

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FAMOUS
fantastic
MYSTERIES
Combined with
FANTASTIC NOVELS MAGAZINE

JUNE, 1952

MARY GNAEDINGER, *Editor*

VOL. 13 NO. 4

Full Length Feature

HER WAYS ARE DEATH — **Jack Mann** — **10**

The blood of the dark and fearsome Valkyrs ran in her veins. . . . And he was the master of modern necromancy. . . . Which would survive when the two clashed?

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Short Stories

GENTLEMEN, BE SEATED — **Robert Heinlein** — **92**

When man gets off the earth, he may still need earthly ingenuity. . . .

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I'LL TAKE CARE OF YOU — **Oliver La Farge** — **98**

It was the same voice "talking him in" which he'd last heard in bitterly threatening anger. . . .

Features

THE READERS' VIEWPOINT — **6**

IN THE NEXT ISSUE — **89**

TO AN AZTEC RELIC — **Paul Wilson** — **91**

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THE NEXT ISSUE
WILL BE ON SALE MAY 21.

Cover by Lawrence. Inside Illustrations by Lawrence, Finlay, and Bok

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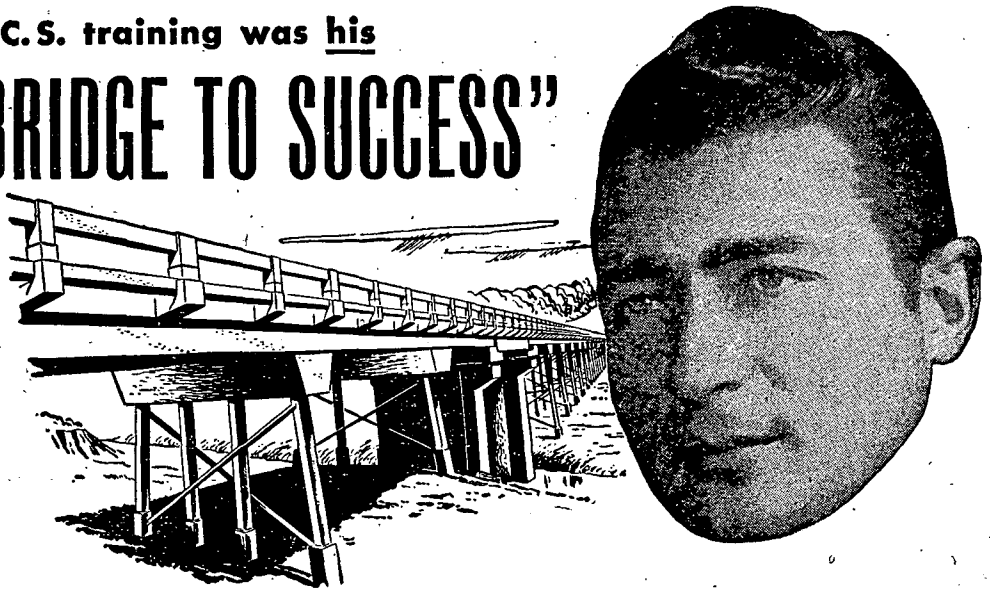
I.C.S. training was his "BRIDGE TO SUCCESS"



HAYDEN M. HARGETT took his first I. C. S. course while he was still a student in high school.

He is now County Engineer of Franklin County, Alabama. Last year Mr. Hargett designed 27 homes, two theaters, a bus station and three bridges. He supervised fifty miles of highway construction and the paving of one hundred thousand square yards of city streets.

Mr. Hargett recently enrolled for another I. C. S. course

Listen to what he has to say about I. C. S. training: "It's more practical—more flexible than any training I've had. I can't speak highly enough of my I. C. S. training."

Mr. Hargett says his first I. C. S. course was his "bridge to success." "There might not have been much of a career," he said, "if it hadn't been for that first I. C. S. course."

I. C. S. training can be your "bridge to success." Mail the coupon today!

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THE READERS' VIEWPOINT

Address comments to the Letter Editor, Famous Fantastic Mysteries, Popular Publications, Inc., 205 E. 42nd St., New York 17, N. Y.

FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Readers:

The consensus is that "The Valley of Eyes Unseen" is as good as "The Starkenden Quest", and as a result of the two successes there has started up a sort of Gilbert Collins cult among the readers. You will find in these columns further interesting information sent from Mr. Collins in England to Jim Fleming, who has kindly shared it with all of us.

The feature story in this issue is by a favorite of fantasy connoisseurs, Jack Mann. He is well known for "The Maker of Shadows" and "The Ninth Life", which appeared in the *Argosy*. This story, "Her Ways Are Death", is a collectors' item, and it is safe to say that not many copies of it can be found. The character named Gees appears in a number of Jack Mann's stories, and there is no episode in his colorful career as detective that is more fascinating than this encounter with the lovely witch, Ira. In my personal opinion, the story in this issue is the best of them all, a really famous fantastic mystery.

The next issue will bring two important stories. One, "The White Wolf" by Franklin Gregory is one of the finest werewolf stories in that classification of fantasy. Mr. Gregory is a newspaperman who has several books to his credit and who has written a number of magazine stories. The other treasure we have dug up to shine with this one is a novelette by T. S. Stribling from our own *Adventure Magazine*—a milestone in top-ranking fantasy as well as having come from the pen of a very important American literary figure. Of Mr. Stribling's many well-known stories of the American South and adventure in the exotic places of the earth, one stands out in memory as having won the Pulitzer prize for literature—namely, "The Store". Our story, "The Green Splotches" is very famous and beloved of true fantasy initiates.

Sincerely in Fantasy,
Mary Gnaedinger.

ORCHIDS TO LAWRENCE

When a Democrat attacks a Republican, or vice versa, that's okay with me; when people attack President Truman, Roosevelt, Dianetics, the Shaver Mystery and anything else they want to attack, this too is okay with me. *But* when a guy attacks Jules Verne, that's going too far!

I am referring, of course, to Edward Nickerson's letter in the December F.F.M. (thanks to the Spirits of Deceased Writers there wasn't a sequel in the new February issue).

Jules Verne is dead, a commonly known fact, but I for one wish he were here to answer Nickerson, himself—he could do it better than I, that's for sure. The *few* credits he gave the master of stf. and fts. do not detract from the bad credits he so painstakingly wrote out.

Mr. Nickerson is pretty naïve if he thinks that all the fans of Verne are going to appreciate his letter—a thing which I greatly doubt. Regardless of the mistakes that Verne made, he is still great and we owe him a lot for his efforts in contributing to the future his basic ideas for the submarine and bathysphere those many years ago when stf/fts were still young pastimes.

To get to the February '52 ish. I ran all over this town (Washington, D. C.) trying to find F.F.M. and finally got a copy at a sidewalk stand. Guess it was sold out. In case anyone is interested in a D. C.'s F.F.M. location, I will tell you: it's on the corner of 36th and M Streets, N. W.—right near the little bridge, or to be technical, the Francis Scott Key Bridge.

For those who are in New York City when F.F.M. comes out, I would suggest you buy the mag at the IND Subway on the corner of 8th Ave. and 42nd St., *down* at the cigar and newspaper counter.

"The Valley of Eyes Unseen"—well! Well, well, well, in fact! As much as I enjoyed the novel "The Starkenden Quest", I still can't help saying this beats it by far—Collins *did* do a much better job, at that.

I liked the cover by Lawrence very much—his Asiatic covers seem to be his best. Two Asiatic stories in succession— Well, at least it is novel to get away from English settings! When are we going to get a Finlay cover? While on the subject of Finlay's art—he must have been inspired when he made the illo on page 37! Perhaps the

(Continued on page 8)

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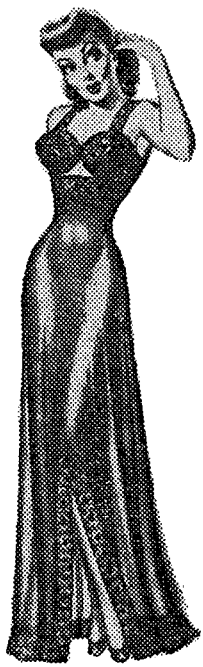
Bewitchery

She'll be your "Dream Girl" You'll "Bewitch" her with it

Daring "BLACK MAGIC"



"DREAM GIRL" She'll look alluring, breathtaking, enticing, exotic. . . . Just picture her in it . . . beautiful, fascinating SEE-THRU sheer. Naughty but nice. . . . It's French Fashion finery . . . with peek-a-boo magic lace. . . . Gorgeously transparent yet completely practical (washes like a dream . . . will not shrink). Has lacy waistline, lacy shoulder straps and everything to make her love you for it. A charm revealing Dream Girl Fashion. . . . In gorgeous Black.

SATISFACTION GUARANTEED
or your money back

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Please send me DREAM GIRL gown at $9.95. If not entirely satisfied, I'll return within 10 days for full cash refund.

( ) I enclose $9.95 cash, check or money order, send postage prepaid (I save up to 90c postage). (You may get it at our store too!)

( ) I will pay postman $9.95 plus postage. Check size wanted:

32 34 36 38 40 IN BLACK ONLY
(If you don't know the size send approximate height and weight)

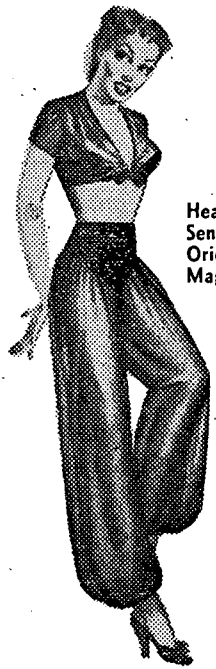
Name .....

Address .....

City ..... State.....

Heaven Sent

Heaven Sent Oriental Magic



Out of the pages of the Arabian Nights comes this glamorous sheer Harem pajama. You'll look beguiling, alluring, irresistible, enticing. You'll thrill to the sleek, clinging wispy appeal that they will give you. He'll love you for transplanting you to a dream world of adoration centuries old. Brief figure hugging top gives flattering appeal to its daring bare midriff. *Doubled at the right* places, it's the perfect answer for hostess wear. Billowing sheer bottoms for rich luxurious lounging. He'll adore you in this charm revealing Dream Girl Fashion. In wispy sheer black.

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Please send "Heaven Sent" pajamas at $9.95. If not entirely satisfied, I'll return within 10 days for full cash refund.

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Black Sorcery

Daring Bare-back She'll be entranced with it

Your Dream girl will be an exquisite vision of allurement, charm, fascination and loveliness in this exotic, bewitching, daring bare-back filmy sheer gown. It's delicate translucent fabric (washes like a dream) will not shrink.
Have Paris at home, with this cleverly designed halter neck that ties or unties at the flick of a finger. Lavishly laced midriff and peek-a-boo bottom. She'll love you for this charm revealing Dream Girl Fashion. In exquisite black sheer.

SATISFACTION GUARANTEED
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Please send BLACK SORCERY gown at $9.95. If not entirely satisfied, I'll return within 10 days for full cash refund.

( ) I enclose $9.95 cash, check or money order, send postage prepaid (I save up to 90c postage). (You may get it at our store too!)

( ) I will pay postman $9.95 plus postage. Check size wanted:

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(If you don't know the size send approximate height and weight)

Name .....

Address .....

City ..... State.....

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(Continued from page 6)

princess appeared to him while he was working on it—could be.

Correction: Roul Copella as spelled by J. Romanoff is wrong, it's Raul Capella—"a" not "o." And as to "fts"—Ray (Raul) and I have been using that for some time—you will notice I used it in my letter. A simple abbreviation, stf backwards and definitely should be used nationally as Jan says—Ray couldn't have dug up anything more appropriate.

I would like to call to the reader's attentions the fact that a new fanzine is out now and for subscription rates, etc., they should get in contact with either Gregg Calkins at 930 Briarcliff Ave., Salt Lake City 16, Utah, or R. G. Capella, 480 Clinton Ave., Brooklyn 16, N. Y. It promises reading pleasure and is quite up to date—subscribe now, while you can.

If Mrs. Gnaedinger wants ideas of the fans as to what could be printed, then all she has to do is take a week off and re-read the fan's letters. As for me, I still would like to see "Wisdom's Daughter" in F.F.M.—no greater book about "She" was ever written. This book is *pure* fantasy about how "She" came-to-be-and-is. I would suggest you fans back me up on this request—unless, of course, you can pay $2.50 for a copy of the book.

ROY WHEATON.

430 E. Third St.
So. Boston 27, Mass.

CONGRATULATIONS

I'm another one of the thousands of firsts, having never written a letter to a mag. Just thought I'd compliment you on this month's novel. First of Collins' work I've run across in my ten years of fandom, but I'm forced to agree with your prediction that I'd like the story. Possibly more long winded than necessary, but very good reading. The author seems to think he is writing from an equal standing with adults.

My congratulations.

Something that I can't figure out. Is that Poe fan a male or a female? Must be a man, since I have yet to meet a female who likes Poe's morbid style. At any rate, welcome to the club of those who worship at the feet of Poe.

I was happy to read a little chiller like "Blight", in that L. Major Reynolds let me draw my own conclusions as to the future of the race. Not too formidable looking. . . .

Please refer any of your Poe fans to me at the following address. Thank you.

PFC. LAWRENCE C. LANE, RA1631548.
HQ. CO. TRUST APO 209,
c/o P.M., New York, N. Y.

YOU CAN HELP!

I am now, and have been for the past five years, preparing for publication as a hard-cover book, a "Guide to Science-Fiction and Fantasy Novels." For more data in my search, I am appealing to your fans.

The purport of this book is to give the public the title and author's name of every Science-Fiction and Fantasy Novel ever printed in the English language. There will be no brief resume or review of what the novel contains, for that would certainly entail a great amount of unnecessary labor.

I want everything in the line of Science-Fiction and Fantasy. From the Grimm Brothers' "Fairy Tales" to the greatest of the classics written by Verne, Poe, Haggard et al.

What I request of your readers is this: I would like anyone who possibly could, to check both their memories and their own personal libraries for the title and name of the author of every Science-Fiction and Fantasy novel they have ever read, heard about or collected. It may be one hundred or it may be one. Regardless of the number, any and all will be greatly appreciated. In the event that a title is known, but not the author's name, it will still be sufficient and little trouble should develop in discovering the author's name.

Since it is desired to have the book ready for publication by June 1, 1952, the day of final compilation will be May 1, 1952 and only letters or post cards mailed before April 15, 1952 can be used. A total of over 100,000 titles and authors may be expected.

The names of novels printed in Science-Fiction and Fantasy periodicals will be acceptable, but to a minimum only of 35,000 words. Novelettes and short stories cannot be used.

ALLAN W. ECKERT, S/Sgt., USAF AF 16 288 347
Headquarters, 2750th AB Group,
Wright-Patterson Air Force Base,
Dayton, Ohio.

SAN DIEGO CONVENTION

The time has come for all science-fiction readers and enthusiasts to realize that an event of national importance is taking place in San Diego this year. Namely, on June 28th and 29th. The Sou-Westercon.

This will be a convention in the world-famous U. S. Grant Hotel (any taxi-cab driver or cop can tell you where), and the attendance fee will be less than you would normally expect.

The San Diego Science-Fantasy Society, sponsor of this epoch-making convocation, invites not only dyed-in-the-corn s.f. readers to attend, but promises that a number of outstanding figures in the field of s.f. and fantasy writing will be there.

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We want you to know that your dollar will be your key to 48 hours of the best entertainment that any science-fiction convention has ever produced.

CORAL SMITH, Secretary.

3522 Union,
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(Continued on page 104)

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They saw Dark Lagny riding a Valkyr horse in the storm—choosing the dead. . . .

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Her Ways Are DEATH

The blood of the dark and fearsome Valkyrs ran in her veins. . . . And he was the master of modern necromancy. . . . Which would survive when the two magics clashed, as they surely must?

OVER LUNCH at The Three Choughs at Yeovil, Gregory George Gordon Green read through again the letter that had started him on his journey from London.

Had he been in any hurry to complete that journey, he would have taken the Dorchester road out from Salisbury, but the letter suggested an appointment that gave him plenty of time, and, on the word of his friend Tony Briggs of the Foreign Office, the cuisine and cellar of The Three Choughs justified one in making a point of lunching there.

So, over coffee and a spot of liqueur brandy in the dining room

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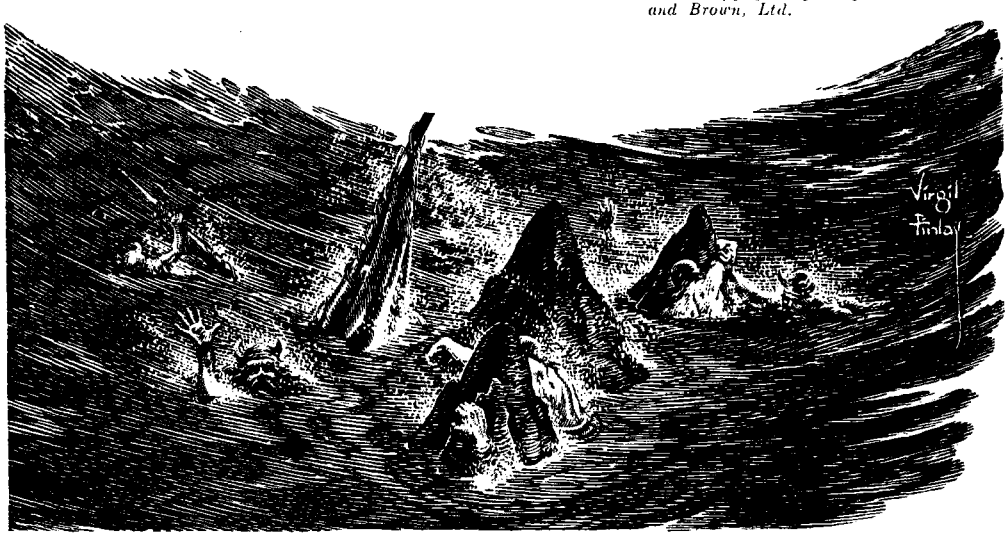

By Jack Mann

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—and a cigarette, of course—Gees took out the letter and read again—

Troyarbour Hall,
Blandford,
Dorset.

Messrs. Gees (G. Green, Esq.)
Confidential Agents
37 Little Oakfield Street
London, S.W.1.

Dear Sir,

I have been recommended to you by Mr. Hunter, of Denlandham, Shropshire, whose name and address will, I believe, be easy for you to recall to memory. Mr. Hunter, on hearing the story I had to tell him, at once recommended me to you, as one who had carried out for him a most unusual and difficult series of investigations and brought them to a highly satisfactory end.

I should be glad if you could see your way to call on me at the above address at the earliest possible date, with a view to giving me, at the least, your advice, and if possible your aid in connection with a problem which I have no intention of putting in writing. If you can see your way to visiting me, not before mid-afternoon (which would involve putting up for the night, probably) I should be happy to pay all your expenses, and, in addition, the two guineas which I understand is your fee for an initial consultation.

Yours very truly,
J. St. Pol Naylor.

Gregory George Gordon Green, otherwise known as "Gees," refolded the letter and put it in his pocket. It was undated, he had noted on first reading it. If he had not been naturally observant—which he was—the two years he had spent in the police force would have taught him to note trifles, whether apparent or real. In actual fact, the letter was a week old. He had had what looked like another promising investigation on hand, and thus had not troubled to answer this communication until, this same autumn morning, he had found himself at a loose end owing to the fizzling out—as he would have expressed it—of that other affair. And so he had wired J. St. Pol Naylor, to announce that he would arrive at 3:30 to 4 p.m. Whether that was convenient or not to this possible client was not a point over which Gees troubled himself. If people wanted to consult him, they could fit it in at such time as he chose.

He spread his very large but well-shaped hands out on the tablecloth, cocked his cigarette holder at an angle beside his long nose, and reflected. Eve Madeleine, his secretary—Miss Brandon, when he addressed her, and "Eve Madeleine" only in her absence—had looked up this Naylor person for him, and had ascertained that he was what Gees would have called a big noise in Nigerian tin. That is to say, he was not a mere landowner, like Gees' own father, finding his possessions more liabilities than assets. It appeared that, if he wanted a thing, he could afford to pay for it, which for a man living in a country mansion designated as "hall" is a rare thing today.

Unmarried, aged forty-five, member of Quinlon's, one of the most exclusive clubs in London, also of the Junior Counties—that caravanserai of elderly bores—and a fellow of two societies entitled to call themselves "Royal," he appeared enviably placed. All these things, and some others which for the moment Gees forgot, the highly efficient and also very attractive Eve Madeleine had dug out and placed before her employer, and then, lacking other occupation at the time, had gone back to her desk and got on reading Winston Churchill's monumental work on his ancestor, Marlborough. She had read so many novels to pass the time in that Little Oakfield Street office that she was satiated with fiction, and so turned to more serious stuff.

Now, having considered the potentialities of this possible client, Gees called for and paid his bill, after which he pushed back his chair and got up, displaying a pair of feet which hinted, to say the least of it, that he ought not to have resigned from the police force. Presently, one of those noteworthy though not abnormally large feet was playing on the accelerator pedal of the grey, black-winged Rolls-Bentley which helped to prove that Gees had made a financial success of his first case, and the nose of the open car pointed southeast by south as its owner—and driver—cogitated over the man who had written that letter. That is to say, he cogitated part of the time.

For this way, after he had got well out from Yeovil, lay over the downlands that, perhaps, are richest in all that history of Britain—which is so old as to be out of history, and, a sensitive, as he undoubtedly was, he felt the influences by which he was surrounded. For there on the downs sleep the very old dead, the first reasoning beings to tread and hunt and fight over the land which then was part of Europe—when Dover cliffs and Gris-Nez facing them reared high and distant over the river that flowed toward the fertile valleys now lying fathoms down under the English Channel.

Sometimes they sleep uneasily, those old ones Gees, driving past their resting places, sensed their unease, felt them as not dead at all, but sentient, watchful—of what? He put that question to himself as the letter in his pocket recurred to his mind. It was the letter of a pedant, almost, of a man careful of his

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words, of his dignity—over-careful of all that maintained him in his place. . . .

Trois arbres. The three trees would have vanished, long since. They had probably rotted away ages before Naylors got hold of the hall—thanks to Eve Madeleine, Gees knew that Naylors had inhabited there since the days of the second Charles. Admirable girl, Eve Madeleine. She got just the facts he wanted, the things that facilitated his quest for atmosphere.

This Naylor. . . . Gees told himself that he was in danger of going to this interview with a prejudice against the man. Something in the phrasing of that letter was ruffling, irritant. He sensed pomposity. . . .

And saw, on a signpost, *Troyarbour, 3. Blandford, 15.* Indicating that the village was twelve miles distant from its post town. Well, these Dorset villages were widely spaced—it was not a populous county. The open downland stretched for miles with hardly a house in view, and such towns as existed, like Blandford, snuggled down in the valleys for the sake of water—and, secondarily, for shelter.

Another signpost, marking the divergence of a mere lane from the well tended road Gees had so far followed, bore the legend, *Troyarbour Only. No Through Road.* He took to the lane, and eased his rate of travel for the sake of his springs and shock-absorbers. Ruts had been partly filled in with granite chips, loose and crunchy under the tires of the car. There was width for vehicles to pass each other only at intervals, and, if two met between the widenings, one or other would be compelled to back. The lane went up and down, winding not too steeply until shoulders of the bare downland folded it into a windless stillness.

A LONE farmhouse with its outbuildings appeared on an acre or so of flatland, unfenced from the lane, and hens chirrawked away from the passing car, while an enormous sow with her litter of piglets eyed the vehicle momentarily and then ignored it. Down and yet down, with the farmstead invisible behind, and Gees reflected that the man who had measured off that three miles must have ignored the windings of the lane and marked up the crow-flight distance. Well, the afternoon was young, yet, and in the placid October sunshine this valley was a pleasant thing, with a mildness in its still air that was also invigorating.

At the end of the twisted descent the shouldering heights that had enclosed the lane receded, leaving a pocket of almost-flatness in which were set an inn, with a signboard picturing three hawthorn trees in the full bloom of May—it was a fairly well-executed piece of work, with no lettering on the board. There was a general store and post-office building. Three wires came over the downs to descend to its roof and mark it a telegraph office, and two wires went on, up the ascent to which Gees faced. There were five cottages, and a bay-windowed, rather modern-looking house standing by itself to face all the rest. And this, Gees decided, was Troyarbour.

When he got out from the car to inquire the whereabouts of the Hall, the post-office sign confirmed his belief, and also informed him that Martha Kilmain was the presiding genius there. Since the inn was closed at this hour he entered the store, and found that the goods for sale ranged from drapery and even shamelessly displayed lingerie, by way of bread and cakes to cheese, bacon, and hob-nailed boots. It was quite impossible that a place of such meagre dimensions could hold and exhibit such a variety of wares, yet there they were, on show. And, emerging from a bacon-festooned doorway, a mighty female of middle age, a very Amazon of a woman with bare, muscular arms, an utterly expressionless face, and—almost an absurdity on such a one—a wealth of rippling, corn-coloured hair. Martha herself, Gees concluded.

"Could you be so good as to direct me to Troyarbour Hall?" he asked, and made the question as ingratiating as possible. Tobacco and cigarettes were among the articles purveyed here, and he might want to overhaul the stock, later—if a case resulted from his interview.

She pointed through the wall of the shop, in the direction which the Rolls-Bentley faced. She said, "Foller the road, you can't go wrong." Whereon he thanked her and went out again, for the manner of her reply had indicated that she did not want to be troubled any more.

He drove on. Beyond the valley bottom the lane, ascending again, was a mere cleft between two massy slopes, with abrupt windings that hid what lay ahead, and the pair of wires from the post-office carried on poles beside it. Here, though, it had been cut to two vehicle width at some time. A half-mile or more of fairly steep ascent, and then the car bonnet faced a pair of iron gates swung on stone pillars, and beyond the gates was a short drive, gravelled and well-kept, rising gently to the Hall frontage, that too of grey stone.

Two-storied, with ground-floor windows a good ten feet in height, the structure nested into the hills at the far side of a little plateau, on which were clumps of rhododendrons, yellow-leaved laurels, and single-standing monkey-puzzlers and other trees exotic to Dorset. Hawthorns, easily recognisable by their berries, flanked the drive and made it an avenue, and the place as a whole gave evidence of scrupulous tendance. Here, it said in effect, is

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wealth, and one who does not fear to use it.

Gees said to himself as he got out to open the gates—there was no lodge at the entrance—"Yes, ten guineas, for a certainty—and expenses at top level!" And he knew, as after driving through he got out again and closed the gates, that he had a distinct prejudice against the owner of this place—without having seen the man.

For a minute or less the scrollwork of the gates themselves held him. Sixteenth or seventeenth-century Italian work, he felt sure: there was a delicate artistry, a strengthening balance in the work from top to bottom, such as English iron-fashioners seldom compass without a certain clumsiness, which betrays the intent to combine strength with decorative effect. Here, he knew as he gazed, was the work of an artist in iron, one sensitive enough to be content with nothing less than perfect work.

He got back into the car, and swung it to a standstill opposite the pillared portico, over which was a shield in low relief on the stone, bearing the initials—I. R. N. and the date 1701. The panelled, black-green, massive door was in keeping with the date, and Gees, pulling a bell-handle beside it, noted that the door swung back as silently as easily, to reveal a parlourmaid, young and pretty, and rather over-daintily attired for her part—it was a stage costume, rather than a working dress.

He asked, "Mr. Naylor?" And with no inquiry of any kind she asked in turn, "Will you come this way, sir?" She took, and deposited, his shabby old felt hat and shabbier overcoat, and conducted him through the high-ceiled hall, decorated with stags' and rams' heads, mooses' heads and tigers' heads—and even an elephant's head—to another door in a corridor at the back of the hall, where she halted to ask, "Mr. Green, isn't it?"

He said, "Yes," and on that she opened the door and announced him. Entering, he saw the reverse of his expectation. He had looked for a beefy, Squire Westernish sort of man, and found himself facing one thin and small and delicate, with finely shaped hands and feet, soft, appealing brown eyes, and very pale lips. A shy, anaemic sort of man, at first sight, who greeted his caller with a charming smile, and, offering his hand, said, "Mr. Green? I'm so glad you were able to get here. It's rather early for tea, but—shall I ring?"

"Thank you, no," Gees answered. "I've lunched not long since, and don't feel like tea yet. If you don't mind."

"Why, certainly not. A business man, evidently, in spite of the nature of your business—I speak of that from hearsay, and you must forgive me if I trespass too far."

Again Naylor smiled, that very charming expression of friendliness which Gees found a little disturbing. He had an instant's memory of those entrance gates, all artistry, and yet concealed in it was tremendous strength. So here—perhaps! He was far from sure as to whether his first impressions of this man were to be trusted. *Amba gachle,* as the Zulus say—tread softly!

He said, "I don't see where the trespass comes in. Do you mind my asking where you got those marvellous gates at your boundary?"

"Picked them up in Milan, for not merely a song, but one line of the first verse," Naylor answered readily, and laughed a little. "I'm glad you noticed them. Not many people have the seeing eye."

"Very few could miss such a pair," Gees assured him. "But—you wanted—what?" He put it as bluntly as he could, being determined not to yield to any spell this strange man could weave. For the man was strange. He was as exotic here, as the monkey-puzzlers in front of his Hall. He was small and frail, yet he had power. Gees felt it.

He said, "Ah, yes! You have not much time, perhaps. And that fee of yours for initial consultation—two guineas. All very well if one comes to you in London, but your coming here—taking the trouble, I mean. Shall we make that two into a ten?"

"My own idea," Gees assured him promptly, and saw the thin, delicate features harden slightly at his apparent rapacity. "And expenses, of course. Eight, say—eighteen guineas for the total."

He put it as brutally as he could, determined as he was to give this man not one inch of advantage—the prejudice against him, with which he had driven here, was growing stronger and yet stronger. Naylor nodded a rather frigid assent to his estimate.

"Eighteen—yes. I will write you the cheque before you leave."

"Very good of you," Gees told him. "And now—what is it you want of me? Something you wouldn't put in writing, I understood from your letter." He saw the thin, delicate hands of the man facing him quiver as he put the blunt question, and divined that Naylor was afraid—of something. Though why one in his position should fear—

"I am going on what Hunter—Hunter of Denlandham—told me about you," Naylor said slowly. "Mr. Green, my case is not a haunted house. . . . Do you believe in witchcraft?"

"Believe in it—no," Gees said promptly. "In the possibility that there is such a thing—yes. Obeah, Voodoo, the evidence is—"

"No!" Naylor interrupted rather peremptorily. "Not African magic—or hoodoo, if it is that. Witchcraft, for which women used to be

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drowned, and burned, and all the rest. That sort, I mean."

"I believe it did exist," Gees answered cautiously.

"Supposing I tell you it still existed?" Naylor said. "Here, in Troyarbour—and directed against me?"

"Then," Gees answered steadily, "I'd advise you to consult a mental specialist, not a confidential agent like myself."

"Will you let me try to convince you?" Naylor asked earnestly.

—Gees nodded assent. "But I'm tough," he pointed out. "I take an awful lot of convincing. Who and what is your witch—or wizard?"

"Witch!" Naylor made an exclamation of the word. "Witch, if ever there was one! Here, in Troyarbour, and—and—her ways are death!"

GEES said calmly, "You seem to have a certain respect for the potentialities of this lady, whoever she may be. In fact—well!" He left it at that, except for an inquiring glance at Naylor.

He wanted to keep this interview on a light note, if possible. Naylor's fingers were clasping and unclasping, and altogether the man looked as if he believed what he said—as if he were in fear. Yet, Gees felt sure, he was a strong character, and not altogether a likable one at that. If he maintained this intensity, things might become difficult. He might, too, be attaching far too much weight to nothing at all. Ever has an accusation of witchcraft been hard to prove. Nineteen out of twenty times it has had no foundation in fact, but has been dictated by envy, covetousness, or mere spite.

Naylor said, doubtfully, "It is a long story, I'm afraid."

"The night is young," Gees rejoined cheerfully. "In fact, it isn't tea time, yet, and I'm going to hunt quarters in this locality when it threatens to get dark—not go back to London."

"I believe you could get a room at The Three Thorns," Naylor informed him. "They take in tourists sometimes—hikers, I believe the people call themselves. Men and girls, with knapsacks—" He broke off, obviously embarrassed. Gees reflected that, by the look of this place, there must be dozens of empty bedrooms, and made no comment.

He said, "This long story, now? Or have you changed your mind?"

"No— Oh, no!" It was a hasty, almost frantic denial—the man was far too intense, Gees knew. "It goes back—well, a long way. I said it was a long story. Are you in any way conversant with mythology—ancient beliefs?"

"'The Golden Bough,'" Gees told him solemnly, "is one of the fondest things I'm of. I sometimes make it a bedside book."

"Then"—Naylor frowned at the levity of the reply, but made no comment—"you will know the Norse legends, I expect?"

"Witchcraft enough there," Gees observed, more gravely.

"And—and other things," Naylor amended. "Such as—both the Valkyrs and the Volsungs owned Odin as their father. I am more particularly concerned with the Volsung race—Wagner used that legend in his Germanized version of a Norse myth—as it is usually considered."

"And as, of course, it is," Gees added.

Naylor shook his head. "Oh, no!" he dissented, and again there was evident in him an intensity which, on the face of it, the subject did not warrant. "The gods of Norse legend actually existed—not as immortals, but as heroes of the race, originally. They were deified and given attributes of godhead by later generations, but Odin and Thor, and Baldur —existed. And Loki—he too was real."

"A prehistoric confidence trickster," Gees suggested.

Naylor not only frowned, this time, but voiced his objection to such flippancy with regard to a subject on which, evidently, he was far from flippant. He said, "I don't like your tone, Mr. Green. Loki was real evil, personified. A power, in his time."

"And there you have it—in his time," Gees retorted calmly. "A swindler of any sort—a person who thrives on deceit—is a real evil in any time, and you yourself own that the gods of Norse mythology were not immortals at all, but heroes subsequently deified. And I'm not going to use a kow-towing tone over any one of them, especially Loki, to please you or anybody."

"You will please yourself, of course." To Gees' surprise, the rejoinder was almost meek. "I am going into this matter of the Norse gods, and especially of the Volsung half-gods, children of Odin by a mortal woman, as, say a foundation for what I wish to tell you—over which I felt you might possibly advise me, at the least."

Gees felt all his prejudice against J. St. Pol Naylor returning. That speech was like the man's letter—far too much like it. Didactic, each word chosen carefully—he was on his dignity again.

"The Volsungs—yes. Well? Not a very creditable crowd, were they? That is, by modern standards," Gees said reflectively.

"I am a Volsung," Naylor replied coldly.

"Is that so?" Gees did not sound impressed. "Well, if I were you, I should keep it dark. Difficult to prove, too—"

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"Mr. Green!" The interruption was angrily harsh. "I am sorry I ever asked you to call on me here. I will write your cheque for eighteen guineas as arranged, and bid you good-day." And he got on his feet in pursuance of the intent.

Gees said. "Pity you haven't got a fire here."

Pausing, turning about in curiosity over the remark, Naylor asked, "Why?" A sharply frosty monosyllable, he made it.

"To save me the trouble of striking a match to burn said cheque," Gees answered coolly. "I don't take money I haven't earned."

"You—you—" Naylor sat down again. "I am a Volsung, I tell you!" he reiterated, and now there was fierce intensity in the claim.

"And I tell you it would be difficult to prove it," Gees retorted. "In any case, what does it matter? I don't see—"

"I'll tell you." Naylor appeared to have forgotten his outburst of anger. "Volsung Sigurd carried off Wulfruna, wife to Oger the Nailer, so called because, when he killed an enemy, he cut off the right hand of the dead man and nailed it over the doorway of his great hall. This Wulfruna was still a very lovely woman when Sigurd stole her, for which Oger—today, that name would be Hugo, of course—for which Oger eventually killed him. Wulfruna was left with child by Sigurd, and she hid away and eventually bore the child, a daughter. Except for the sex of the child, this is the story of Siegmund and Sieflinde as Wagner tells it in the *Valkyrie*."

"Obviously," Gees observed, "except also that those two were brother and sister. This Sigurd and Wulfruna were not, I take it."

"They were that, or very nearly that," Naylor answered slowly—reluctantly, it seemed. "They were both Volsungs. All this is out of history, of course, purely legendary. Yet—believe me—true."

"Most legends have a foundation in fact," Gees remarked primly.

"This is fact," Naylor insisted earnestly. "To finish that story though. Wulfruna, before Sigurd came and tempted her away, had borne a male child to Oger, one who was named Oger Ogersson, as was the fashion of naming in those times. Which is evidence, though not proof, that the elder Oger was founder of the family through Wulfruna his wife, because he does not appear to have been called anyone's son, but only Oger the Nailer. And my name, you note, is Naylor."

"There will be missing shoots on that family tree," Gees commented.

"Believe it or not, as you like," Naylor said sourly. "Oger Ogersson dropped the 'Nailer' from his titles, but it was resumed by his grandson, who went viking, and nailed the hands of his dead enemies round the prow of his long ship. And from then on, in various forms according to the time the name—or nickname, if you like—stuck to the family.

"I am descended from Oger Ogersson," Naylor claimed yet again. "Now, to complete that first half of the story. Oger Ogersson was a Baresark—and I think I need not tell you what that means."

"It was a useful quality, in his time," Gees commented.

"But"—Naylor made a long pause—"it would be far from useful to-day. Which"—another long pause—"is part of my reason for asking your advice, at the least. Your help, if—if you are the man Hunter of Denlandham said you were. If, that is, you have the qualities with which he credited you in speaking of you to me."

AGAIN Gees heard the didactic precision of phrase that roused in him prejudice against this man. He said, "I claim to be a specialist in certain directions. We keep wandering from this story of yours, though. What have Oger's baresark habits to do with it?"

"The—the attribute, call it—is transmissible," Naylor said.

"Runs in the family, you'd say," Gees suggested.

"Intermittently. Has persisted down to this present day, in our case, but will miss out two or three—or more—generations, and then recur. Not—not mere anger or unreasonableness, but a blind fury of which one is totally unconscious after the fit has passed. One becomes a different being altogether, and wakens at the end to know nothing of it—nothing of what one has done or said while it lasted."

"I believe that was the case," Gees conceded thoughtfully. "By your way of putting it, it seems as if you—" He did not end it.

"Yes," Naylor said quietly, "and that brings me to the second part of the story, which begins with Wulfruna's daughter by Sigurd—and both that child's parents were of the Volsung breed, remember."

"You claim that you are, too," Gees reminded him.

"That is so—but Sigurd was not my ancestor," Naylor rejoined. "He was that daughter's father, and through him—though he was dead before Wulfruna bore the child—through him she inherited and developed the qualities that make the witch. There was pre-natal influence, and I believe there was, too, the unholy communion that goes with possession of the powers that girl had—you get an outline of it in the tale of the witch of En-Dor. Power to commune with the dead."

For a moment Gees' thoughts went back to

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his drive to this place, and how, as he went over the downlands, he had sensed unease among the very old dead, as if they stirred in their barrows. He asked, "What is the legend of her—what was she called?"

"Lagny. Dark Lagny, because of her hair," Naylor answered slowly. "Because Oger had killed her father, she devoted her life to vengeance on his son—part of her life, that is. Because she had many lovers, and brought harm to them all—ruin to some and death to some. That is a long story in itself, but it is not part of mine that I am telling you now. She was evil and beautiful—the two often go together—and in the end she contrived a spell that drew Oger Ogersson's long viking ship to wreckage on the Northumbrian coast, not far south from Iona. I have seen the place where the ship broke up on the rocks—"

"Where legend says it broke up," Gees interpolated, for again, in telling this story, Naylor was verging on unnatural intensity.

"All that was written down," Naylor insisted. "I have a verbatim copy—it is bad Latin of the second century. The general impression is that the vikings did not come to ravage this country till after the Roman occupation ended, but that is wrong. Oger came, and was drawn toward the rocks by Lagny's witch spells. It was in a night of storm, and only three of Oger's men came out alive—half alive, say, to recover enough to tell their tale.

"I want you to believe, Mr. Green, that I have devoted enough time to search and research to unearth all the facts of this story I am telling you—all the facts, that is, still ascertainable. Palimpsests, fragments of old chronicles, bits of monkish gossip in bad Latin, written in black letters to make it worse—everything I could find, to piece it together and—as far as possible—get this story in full, because of—but I am coming to that."

"You'd got to the wreck of Oger's long ship," Gees reminded him.

"Yes, and the three live men washed ashore. They said—and each of them confirmed the other two—that as the ship was driving on they saw Dark Lagny riding a Valkyr horse in the storm—choosing the dead, that is. Saw her beckoning Oger on, riding high over him as he steered his long ship—whether he too saw her is past telling.

"They said, too, that at the time she was in reality asleep in the arms of her last lover, a Roman officer of the garrison at Eboracum—York—many miles from the point where the long ship was wrecked. Yet they said it was Dark Lagny they saw, past question, but younger and more alive and lovely than she was then—because by that time she had borne children who had nearly grown up, and was past her best. But all three say they saw her, and that her spells caused the wreck."

"Men were credulous, in those days," Gees observed reflectively.

"Ye-es," Naylor half drawled. "So much so that, less than a year after Oger's death—and with no reference whatever to that incident—Dark Lagny was crucified by order of the Roman commander at Eboracum, being found guilty of unholy spells and practices by which men had been compelled to kill each other, or themselves."

"A *lamia*, apparently," Gees commented. "Yet the Romans were a practical people. Materialists to the nth, as a rule."

"*Lamia* perhaps," Naylor half-conceded, "but certainly Volsung—and, if you accept that story told by the three men who escaped from the wreck, Valkyr too. Beloved of Odin, admitted to all the mysteries of that old faith, and so given powers—these things are, Mr. Green." He broke off from his tale to make an earnest insistence of the statement. "You can see stark evil walking the earth to-day, if you look."

"And so they crucified Dark Lagny," Gees mused.

"They should have put an end to her before she bore children," Naylor said somberly. "Because—her death was not the end."

"Else, you would not be telling this tale," Gees surmised, seeing in part the point to which the story was driving.

"Else I should not be telling it," Naylor admitted. "You know, in spite of—of—well, a certain irritating way you have—you are an understanding soul. I feel I can tell this to you."

Not merely prejudice, but distrust of the man wakened as Gees heard the rather fulsome comment on himself. He said, "That may be. This is, as you said, a long story, and I haven't heard it all, yet."

"Dark Lagny left children," Naylor went on. "There were two sons in this country—she spent a good part of her life in Britain—and there were others, sons or daughters, who grew up and settled—and married—in or near where Trondjhem stands to-day. On that fiord. That branch of her family is all that counts in this tale of mine.

"You know Norse is Norman, of course—the Norsemen came to Normandy, and in due time Harold of England fell into Duke William's hands—this part of it is child's history—and swore away his kingdom. Senlac, and the Conquest—and among Duke William's followers was a descendant of Sigurd and Dark Lagny, Hugo Main de Fer—because at some time after Senlac he lost his left hand, and had it replaced by an iron hook.

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"He was a mere man-at-arms, but he got a knighthood or some patent of nobility from the Conqueror over the devastation of the north—when William laid all Yorkshire waste in revenge for the attempted rising. Also, this Hugo found and subsequently married one of the descendants of Dark Lagny's British-born sons. Now I expect you have heard of William de Warenne, the Conqueror's favourite who got so much out of his master?"

Gees nodded assent. "He had manors all over England," he said.

"Yes," Naylor assented, "and this of Troyarbour—*trois arbers*—was one of them. To carry on the story—Hugo Main de Fer died, and his wife became mistress of William de Warenne, for a little while. Through that—they were lax over such things in those days—her son became known as a de Warenne—not as a surname, because there were no surnames at that time, but as belonging to William de Warenne. And William so much favoured him as to give him this manor of Troyarbour—to call it by its present name, and get a barony for him from the Conqueror—am I making this clear to you?"

"Quite clear," Gees told him. "Carry on with the tale."

"MY FOREBEARS—later to be called Naylors—had won pardon of a sort from the Norman authorities, and settled somewhere near here before Hugo's son was granted this manor," Naylor went on. "That Hugo, remember, was descended from Wulfruna and Sigurd. My forebears were descended from Oger Ogersson and Wulfruna—you see?"

"There was—well, a sort of removed cousinship," Gees commented.

"There was the deadliest of enmities," Naylor said emphatically. "Also, on their side, the tendency to—possibility of, rather—the use of witchcraft against us Naylors, as I will call us from this point onward, and on our side the intermittently occurring curse of running baresark.

"As instance. In the time of the first Henry a witch developed among the de Warennes of Troyarbour, and set her wits to ruining the family of Naylors of that day—Saxons, by Norman reckoning, and freemen holding a stead in tenure under a neighboring manor—between here and where Blandford now is. The cattle and sheep died and the crops failed—it was all in pursuance of the old feud between the two families that began when Oger killed Sigurd—and then the eldest son of that Naylor wasted away through her spells—"

"Got tuberculosis, most likely," Gees interposed.

"As may be," Naylor said, making the remark utterly skeptical. "Whether that were so or no, one night the boy's father went baresark, and instead of going out as a freeman of those days should, took an axe and flint and steel and tinder, and went off alone. He fired the gatehouse of these de Warrennes—it was a wooden structure, apparently—and killed three men before his fit wore off. A naked man with an axe against three or more armed men, remember.

"Now—and here comes the part of the story that counts—the king's justiciar of those days judged the case—Henry Beauclerc was strong on forms of law. This was a case of Saxon rebellion against Norman authority, on the face of it, and the Norman in question a sort of connection of the great William de Warenne. Yet—yet!—the baresark Naylor was not hanged, or subjected to torture as one might expect, such as being broken on the wheel or pressed to death. He was let off with the loss of his right eye and right hand, and lived to be a very old man.

"Meanwhile Ira de Warenne—the first woman of the family to be given that name—was burned at the stake as a witch, although she was allegedly of noble birth. Condemned, not by the justiciar, but by ecclesiastical jurisdiction, and as I say, burned at the stake. Unique, I believe."

"Possibly." Gees made it a non-committal comment. "Is any part of this—this family history, call it—documented?"

"In other words, you think I am telling fairy tales," Naylor accused with acrid coldness. "It was all documented, up to the time of the Civil War—about the time of the siege of Corfe, it would be. The Naylor of that day was a Parliament man—he served with some distinction under Ireton—and the Warennes—as they had then become, having lost their title during the Wars of the Roses—were Royalists. Naylor got here with a troop, and managed to sack and burn the castle that stood where this house stands now, and most of the old records went up in smoke—the Parliament men were all iconoclasts, as you know. But that Naylor left children who knew the tale, and most of it is available to me in old letters and diaries. One has to read between the lines to a certain extent, but to us—to me, since I am the only one surviving, now—it is all clear."

"I see." There may have been a tinge of skeptimism in the rejoinder. "And still, all this is story. I don't see the point, yet."

"I am coming now to the point," Naylor said. "It is that once in so many generations—once in a century, perhaps, or it may be once in two centuries—a Warenn, father or moth-

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er or both, names a daughter Ira, as if they had prescience, foreknowledge, of what was to come in the lifetime of that daughter. Simultaneously—within a few years either way, that is—a son is born to a Naylor, and on him is the baresark curse. It is no less than a curse, believe me. And the old feud is renewed.

"The Ira Warenn, descended from Sigurd and Wulfruna, sets herself to destroy the descendant of Oger and Wulfruna, to rob him of all he values and in the end drive him baresark, so that he may suffer the penalty for wanton killing, as men kill when they are in that state. As surely as a daughter of that family is named Ira—"

He broke off, and sat silent, evidently trying to read what impression his story had made on his auditor. But Gees, keeping a poker face, quoted softly:

"Dies irae, dies illa,
Solvet soeclum in favilla—"

"So!" Naylor said, as if satisfied. "'Ira.' That is, wrath. And she is, whenever she recurs. I see it as a reincarnation—of hate. Time after time has an 'Ira' been named, and each time a Naylor has been cursed with the baresark fits, developing when the Ira Warenn of that time has come to womanhood and full powers. Whether she induces the fits—I don't know. None of us has known."

"You mean—through contact with you?" Gees asked. He was growing interested in this fantastic story. The man who was telling it evidently believed it all, and was influenced by it.

"Not necessarily," Naylor answered. "As instance—all my contact with this Ira Warenn has consisted of quarrels, threats on her side and utterly useless attempts to placate her on mine. It was my fault in the first place, of course—" He broke off, rather nervously.

"I'd better have the whole story," Gees encouraged him.

"Yes. Yes!" He wakened from a moment's reverie—not a pleasant one, by his expression. "The whole story. There have been—this is the thirteenth 'Ira,' since that first one who was burned as a witch. And I am the thirteenth—let that wait, though. My own part in this comes last. I told you they lost their barony during the Wars of the Roses—they were Lancastrians, because always the de Warennes, and Warenns as they call themselves now, have held to the old order, no matter what that order may be. So they held to Lancaster, and lost all but Troyarbour when Earl Warwick lost Barnet Field.

"They kept Troyarbour till a Warenn followed the man Charles Stuart, and went down with Charles Stuart. That is—he was not beheaded, but escaped to France, to come back at the Restoration and try to remind the second Charles Stuart that his father had sacrificed everything to the Royalist cause. And that second Charles was—well, a Stuart. Warenn begged in vain—he was a very old man, then—and a son of his came here. The homing instinct, I suppose you'd call it. He brought enough worldly goods with him to become tenant to us Naylors—I haven't told you, but out of revenge against the Warenns, I take it, the Naylor of Cromwell's time somehow got possession of this manor, and we have held it ever since. Naylors ousting those Warenns, and then their coming back as tenants of the manor they had owned. It must have been bitter for them, proud beggars that they are."

THAT last sentence defined for Gees his own dislike of the man. There was a smug satisfaction in it, revenge accomplished, no matter what its victims might do. Past question, J. St. Pol Naylor kept and nourished a hate, whatever might be the feeling of these Warenns.

"That was—in the time of the second Charles," Gees said.

"And to this day," Naylor added, almost gloatingly. "But"—his tone changed—"now I come to why I asked for an interview with you—my own part in this story. They—that is, the far greater number of villagers who lived in Troyarbour in those days—flung an Ira Warenn into a running stream to sink or swim—for witchcraft, of course—when the foundations of this Hall were being dug. She sank, and drowned—that test is as futile as it is foolish. Because she was a witch.

"She was drowned after the Mrs. Naylor of that time had given birth to a dead infant, and half the cattle belonging to us had died of some disease not diagnosed, and—and that Naylor went baresark and set fire to the barn at the farm, which in turn fired two ricks of corn, and the story goes that it took six men to get him under control and prevent him from killing the witch before the fit passed. And it took pretty much all the justices of the peace in the county to hush up the scandal—though drowning Ira Warenn—you note the accent is on the 'enn', always—put an end to his troubles, in every way. He was quite a normal man, after that."

Spoken with placid satisfaction, that last sentence. Gees felt his prejudice growing again. Was this man quite sane?

"Then they named another 'Ira' about the end of the eighteenth century," Naylor went on. "She was found drowned—that was a

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coroner's inquest verdict—with nothing to show how she came by her death. Whether my great-great-grandfather were baresark or no I do not know. He left no records, and died of apoplexy. The normal, hard-drinking country squire—not in the least a Volsung."

"That is, as far as you know," Gees observed.

"I know!" Again he evinced intensity. "Such of us as hark back to that beginning—such of us as know the story of Oger and Sigurd is real—we are—but I'm wandering from the point again. My own part in it. I was eight years old when the Warenns at the farm—you must have passed that farm before coming to the village—when they named a daughter Ira—the thirteenth Ira. As long as my father lived all went well. I was here very little—I went shooting in the African game preserves after I came down from Cambridge, and did the modern grand tour. And then—there was a woman."

On that he broke off, and Gees saw his mobile face harden, grow almost ugly. Then he smiled, and again was a very attractive man—superficially. He said, "I suppose that is true of every man, sooner or later. She was married, and she came to me. We went away together—it was the year my father died. My mother had been dead a long time. Her—the woman's husband was vindictive. He refused to divorce her. We had a child—a girl child—"

He broke off, there, and now Gees did not dislike, but pitied him. After a while he roused from his memories, and spoke again.

"We came back here—I had to come back, to take over all my father had left. He had not been a good business man, and there was much for me—that is not part of the story, though. What is part of it is that for the last four years before his death, Warenn, this Ira's father, had paid no rent. It is not that I need the money, but—well, you can't let one tenant off and compel the others to pay. I went to see him—and did not. He was then dying, and I saw . . . Ira."

"Well?" Gees asked it after a long silence.

"I—I almost forgot you were here," Naylor confessed. "Yes, Ira Warenn. Dark Lagny—unutterable allure—I knew all the legends were true, when I saw her that day. Yet, to me, hateful—I was near on baresark then. You see, that curse has come down to me. Which is why I called on you, to see if there is any way—"

"You should see a mental specialist, not me," Gees said gravely.

"Damn all mental specialists!" Naylor broke out with sudden, bitter passion. "Wait, though! I told that girl I could not make an exception of her father, because of others—I could not run this estate as a charitable institution. I remember I used just those words. It was reasonable, but—her father was dying even then. She knew it—I did not. She told me the manor of Troyarbour was his and hers, by right, not mine at all.

"She told me she was Wulfruna's daughter—daughter, mind you!—and she would leave me with nothing I valued, and when she had taken all would destroy me, myself. She would leave me not even the dog I had with me that day—it was a red setter I loved more than any dog I ever knew. She called the curse of Odin on me, and told me she would take from me all that I loved. And all the time I saw her as Dark Lagny, allure unutterable—I could have lost all reason in her arms, and yet hated her the while. Perhaps you cannot understand that—because it is beyond my own understanding. Dark Lagny, daughter of Wulfruna who was mother of my race as of hers. This is a thing of the Volsung breed, where brother and sister mate as the Incas and Pharaohs mated. You will not understand it—I cannot explain it."

"Perhaps I understand more than you think," Gees said dissentingly.

"As may be," Naylor retorted, half-angrily. "Listen, man! In a week the red setter was dead, and I mourned over it as over the loss of a friend. The vet who post-mortemed it said its heart had failed, and he could not tell why. I could tell! Within six months, the only woman who ever meant anything to me died—double pneumonia, in high summer! In high summer, I tell you!

"Within a month of her death, our little daughter was taken away—scarlet fever and diphtheria—and never another case of it that summer within thirty miles of this village! She came back in her coffin, and lies beside her mother—I think my heart lies there too. And I was then—wait, and let me show you. Not as you see me now."

HE WENT to a desk under the high window, opened a drawer, and took out what Gees recognised as a snapshot album. Returning, he handed it over. "Look at them," he said, "and see if you recognise me."

Beginning with the first page, Gees saw photographs of a massively built, middle-aged man, and in one of them his arm was laid over the shoulders of a slight, small, grey-haired woman. Naylor said, "My father and mother—and now you come to me," and Gees asked, "You were an only child?"

"No, the second of three. The other two died in infancy."

Looking out from the page to which Gees had turned was a broad-shouldered, hefty-looking boy of about sixteen, who, although

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the photograph was an amateur snapshot, apparently, had posed for his picture and smirked self-consciously—and self-approvingly. Naylor said, "That was nearly two years before I went up to Cambridge," and Gees turned over the page to see the same boy, older now and developing to vigorous, athletic adolescence, in rowing kit, football shorts, tennis flannels, and corduroys with a gun in the crook of his arm.

"You all the time?" Gees asked.

"All the time," Naylor answered. "You will see why, later—or I can tell you now. She wished it. She mounted all those photographs."

In silence Gees went on turning the pages. They formed a picture chronicle of growth to manhood, and the "she" of whom Naylor had spoken in a tone verging on reverence came in as a woman who stood beside him, tall as himself and, as nearly as the monotone of a photograph told, fair-haired and more than normally attractive. And Naylor himself showed as far different from the man Gees saw now, though he was recognisable as the same man.

He was more virile, physically robust and a bigger, stronger man than this. So he remained through the rest of the series, which included views evidently taken abroad—probably in Riviera resorts, though two or three appeared North African, by the clarity of the light and sharp-edged shadows. The last picture of all showed him bending over a cot in which an infant lay, and he took the album out from Gees' hands and closed it abruptly, almost rudely.

"Not that one," he said. "I wanted you to see—all this has changed me. Do you realise it—that I am changed?"

"You're more—ascetic, say," Gees answered.

"A polite way of saying I'm half the man I was then. Which is quite true. And—let me tell you this too—I'm pariah, you'll find. Because of—of her and the child. Content to be so—she was all to me, and since I was all to her we were happy until—until Ira Warenn took her away from me. Only the people who would know me for my possessions would come here to see me now—and if they come they get turned away. The social life my father and mother knew—the people who make up that life will never know me, because of—because to their thinking she and I lived in sin. Though we did not. But—I am quite alone. I'm still a member of Quinlon's, but I've not been in the club since—since she came to me."

"And that is all the story?" Gees asked.

"All the story—yes," Naylor answered. "Except—say it is the outline of the story. I have yet to tell you why I want your advice."

"Perhaps I can guess, but won't," Gees told him. "Do you mind if I summarize what you have told me, from a practical viewpoint?"

"Do so, by all means. I should like to know your view."

"You wouldn't—won't," Gees said rather grimly, "but I'll give it to you. For a beginning, I will discount all this legend of Dark Lagny, and her mother Wulfruna, who you claim is ancestress both to you and these Warenns. I will rule all that out, and to a certain extent will ignore your allegation that witchcraft has run in the Warenn family all the way up to Cromwell's time. Because wherever a feud persisted between two families, accusations of that sort were likely to be made, and superstition was strong enough to establish them on very slight evidence—without actual proof. Many an innocent man and woman has suffered death on that charge, as probably you know."

"I do know it," Naylor agreed. "But—"

"Wait!" Gees interrupted. "I am giving you my view. When your Naylor of Cromwell's period seized on this manor of Troyarbour, the Warenns of that day obviously had a grudge against him—there was already the feud between the two families. The Warenns had a way of perpetuating a rather uncommon name for a girl—but it is no more uncommon than your own 'St. Pol'. They very foolishly—I should call it that—came back here as tenants of the family they had cause to hate, since they regarded that family as dispossessing them. On your side, you Naylors were only too ready to attribute any trouble that came your way to some sinister influence exerted by a Warenn—"

"Always by an Ira Warenn," Naylor interposed.

"Or by no Warenn at all," Gees insisted. "I tell you, you have no proof. In all you have told me, I can find no proof. If I take your own story—and forgive me if I put it rather brutally—there were in succession a dog, a woman, and a child, all three dying after a probably neurotic woman—or girl—who has some knowledge of the old legend that oppresses you, had made a vague threat against you. Can you trace any actual contact between that Ira Warenn and any one of those three? Any contact whatever?"

"No-o." Naylor owned it reluctantly, dubiously. "But—"

"No," Gees went on, "you can't. You have as little proof against her, over these three deaths which can be attributed to purely natural causes, as your ancestors had against the other Warenn women whom they accused of witchcraft, or—I'm anticipating what you would say—got up enough prejudice to cause

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the accusation to come from independent sources. And now you've lived here alone and brooded till that old legend and the feud between you Naylors and those Warenns have become the principal interests of your life. You want my advice—I'll give it you now. Shut up this place for, say, a year. Go abroad again, do anything rather than stay brooding here alone. Get among normal people and revive normal interests—be a normal man among others, as you were meant to be. And come back to laugh at this Ira Warenn and regard her as merely foolish, not a witch or potent."

Naylor shook his head. "I—I cannot do that," he said.

"You mean you think you can't do it," Gees amended for him.

"No—it is not thinking. Because—as is always the case when a girl of that family is named Ira—I—I am a Baresark."

For a brief interval Gees wanted to shout laughter. If a rabbit had proclaimed its power to roar like a lion, the assertion would not have seemed more absurd. This smallish, delicate, even anaemic-looking being, going ravening with axe or club, was not merely an incredibility, but a preposterous impossibility! The man was mad.

"And what advice did you intend asking?" Gees inquired after a long, long pause, in which he could hear Naylor's uneven breathing

"How to—how to neutralize her powers—Ira Warenn's powers," Naylor answered, dubiously and nervously.

"That's easy—just don't believe in 'em," Gees said bluntly. "As I see it, you're a case of self-hypnosis. You dislike the woman and know she dislikes you—you own that you gave her cause—"

"I have seen her since," Naylor interrupted, "and done my best to remove the cause. Offered to do all I could for her as my tenant—" He broke off, rather than ended the sentence, and though Gees waited he did not end it.

"How did she take the offers?" Gees asked at last.

"Laughed at them—and at me. Renewed her threats."

"Why not turn the woman out—get rid of her?"

"I can't. They hold on lease—over eight years of it to run."

"Then, as I said before, go yourself, and come back cured of these fears—these utterly groundless fears—of yours."

"I can't do that either, and they are not groundless."

Gees stood up. "You merely emphasize the truth of an old saying, that the only advice people will take is that which coincides with their own inclinations," he said. "I can offer you no other than what I have already given—and if I get to the main road before dark I can be back in London to-night."

"I see." Naylor, also on his feet, spoke very coldly. "Just one minute while I write you your cheque. Eighteen guineas, I think."

"Thank you, that is the amount." Gees spoke equally coldly.

Naylor took up the album, which he had put down on the floor, and with it went to the desk from which he had taken it. He put it away again and, taking out a cheque-book, wrote the cheque and handed it to Gees, who glanced at it and crumpled it into his pocket.

"Thank you very much, Mr. Naylor—and good-bye."

"I—I can't offer you any refreshment, I suppose?" With the offer, Naylor unbent, evinced some slight cordiality. Gees shook his head.

"No, thank you. It must be within an hour of sunset, and—well, that lane! A merciful man is merciful to his car. No, don't trouble to ring—I know my way out. Good-bye."

CHAPTER II

NEW MAGIC IS OLD

ABOUT TO open the driving side door of his car and seat himself at the wheel, Gees paused, holding the door handle, and staring at the seat. He drew a long breath and murmured, "Holy mackerel!"

For, curled in somnolent comfort on his seat, lay a black cat. A sleek, healthy-looking cat, with his lengthy tail so adjusted that the tip was just under his nose. Reaching in and leaning over, Gees tickled the animal behind its ear, and it wakened to look up at him—gratefully, he thought. He said, "If you could drive, feller, it'd be a different thing. But I guess I'd better plant you where you belong."

He reached farther in and got a hand under the cat, which, unfolding itself, disclosed a small white shirt-front on the blackness of its chest. When he lifted it to hold it against his own chest, it got a paw up on his shoulder and climbed round to the back of his neck, knocking his hat off as it rubbed against his head, purring the while. He stooped to pick up the hat, and the cat retained its place, as it did when he went up to the front door of the hall and rang the bell.

The same attractive-looking parlourmaid opened the door, and, as Gees reached up to lift the cat down, ejaculated, "Goodness!"

"He was in my car," Gees explained. "I thought I'd better hand him back so you'd

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know that he's safe, before driving off—"

"Oh, no, sir!" She backed away as with difficulty he pulled the cat from its perch to hold it out to her. "Mr. Naylor'd go mad if that cat came in here—he would, really! It's Peter!"

"And what's wrong with Peter?" Gees asked curiously.

"He—he belongs to Miss Warenn, sir."

"But—but that's the other side of the village," Gees objected.

"Yes, I know, sir, but Peter goes everywhere."

"Oh, he does, does he?" Gees lifted a paw of which the claws were going through his coat to stick in his shoulder, and held it. "Does he often come here to call?"

"He's only been once before, sir, as far as I know, and then I got the gardener's boy to stone him away. Because Mr. Naylor would recognise the cat if he saw it, and we'd all get in trouble."

"I see. That's all, thank you."

He turned his back on her and, taking Peter to the side of the car, dropped him in and got in himself. The buzz of the starter appeared to worry Peter slightly, but Gees reached down and stroked him as he sat facing the pedals, and then engaged gear and moved off. As he neared the gates, Peter jumped up on the seat beside him and put a paw on his arm as if to claim some attention, and he spared a hand to respond, noting a lad—possibly that same gardener's boy, opening the gates for him.

He thanked the boy as he passed, but, keeping a hand and an eye on Peter, had no chance to get out a tip. It was all one, he thought. There was no need for him to lay up treasure at Troyarbour Hall, for he had no intention of returning there. He disliked Naylor too much. The man believed the story he had told, but, in Gees' opinion, he had gone cracked on it, let it become an obsession.

And now Peter, friendly Peter, provided an opportunity of seeing this Ira Warenn. He could pull in at the farm and deliver the cat—even ask to see her, if she did not appear herself in reply to his knock at the farmhouse door. Since this was her cat, Gees told himself, she was not a witch. Peter was no witch's cat. He was too sociable, too likeable. That paw of his, soft and with retracted claws, came out to pat Gees on the arm if he neglected too long to stroke his passenger. Peter had adopted him, meant to own him—and yet, Gees felt, all this was especial favour. Peter would not own everybody he met, but was making an exception. Perhaps he remembered that on his previous visit to the Hall he had been stoned away, and appreciated the different reception this human had given him.

So thinking, Gees drove through the village, and in a fold of the heights back from the inn, sighted a squat little church and the chimneys and roofs of more cottages. He said, "Y'know, Peter feller, if they had a jail and a pawnshop, this place'd be very nearly civilised." To which Peter responded with a tremendous yawn. Unlike nearly all cats, apparently, he did not object to riding in a car, but was quite happy over it. Gees tickled him behind his ear, and he leaned hard on to the tickle to turn it into a scratch. He liked it.

So, climbing out slowly from the village—because of the bad surface of the lane—they came to sight of the lone farmhouse, and Gees turned aside to halt on the level before the shabby, discoloured frontage. The two ground-floor windows were veiled by casement cloth curtains, but the three above them were bare and stark-looking. The door, as Gees approached it, declared its need of paint, as did the window frames. Peter lay quiescent in this new friend's hold, and Gees was about to stretch out to knock on the door with his knuckles, but a click of the latch and the door's opening forestalled him. He knew, as he gazed, that he was facing Ira Warenn. Or Dark Lagny?

There are moments in life that stretch out to prove the swiftness of thought. This, for him, was such a moment. He saw a slip of a girl with coiled hair of a bluish blackness, the night-black hair that is hardly ever seen on the women of Caucasian stock. There were little curls of it about her ears, and it was loose and wavy over her forehead—over her eyes that were like still sea-pools under the light of the moon. So he would have defined the eyes, but neither then nor at any time could he have told what was their colour. They were dark, so dark that pupil and iris were only just distinguishable.

She used lipstick, he could see, but what other makeup she had used he, being only a man, could not tell. A plain black dress, dark silk stockings and sandals, and round her neck a thin gold chain from which was suspended a tiny pendant, in which a circular, turquoise-blue stone was set in white metal—not a thing of value, but quaint and attractive. He even noted faint intaglio lines, defined in gold, on the stone.

Thus, if he had been asked for a description, he would have catalogued this girl—or woman—and what she wore, and would have known the while that he was not describing her. "Allure unutterable," Naylor had said, and in this first sight of her Gees knew the man had given her no more than her due. Naylor, thus defining her, must have seen her inimical, hating him. Gees saw her slightly amused,

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quite, self-possessed, and coolly assessing him as her wonderful eyes directed the allure that was hers at him, with such a challenge as Lilith must have flung at Adam in the very dawn of woman's conquest of man.

SHE said, "O, Peter!" and her voice was soft and deep as were her eyes. The cat struggled, fell from Gees' hold and, going to her, lifted himself in one bound to her shoulder, to curve himself round the back of her slender, finely modelled neck and look coldly at Gees.

"He did that to me," Gees said, "when I found him in the car."

She said, "It was very good of you to bring him back—but quite unnecessary. He goes for long expeditions, and always comes back."

"If I hadn't fetched him, he might have been stoned," he told her.

A sow, with a litter of piglets, came grunting and snorting toward the doorway. The girl said, "No, Irene—go away!" and the ungainly beast, with a deep grunt that sounded very much like disgust, turned about and lumbered jerkily away, her brood following.

Gees said, "You might have named her Violet, or Lily."

"Then you haven't read W. H. Hudson."

"Oh, yes!" He made it a triumphant assertion. "I know—if man had taken and trained the pig as he has the dog, for the last two hundred years, he would now have a friend just as brave and loyal, and far more intelligent. That was the sense of what he said—I don't remember the exact words. But—Irene! Well, it's not my sow."

"You saw how she did as she was told. She's highly intelligent—all her kind are. They're debased and uglified to make them fat, and the courage they have in a wild state is almost atrophied, now, but still they have the next largest brain to that of man, relatively to their size and that of other animals."

He said, "I don't know if I'm talking to Miss Warenn, but I believe I am. I stopped to bring Peter home, but never expected to get as far as Hudson and the brain content of the genus sus. Or may I say I never hoped to get as far? This is an unexpected pleasure."

"Talking about the genus sus?" she asked, with innocent gravity.

"No—meeting you," he answered.

"Is it?" The dark, wonderful eyes mocked him, then. "When you found out where Peter belonged—keep your claws in, Peter!—when you found that out, you brought him here with the express—but not expressed—intention of finding out what Ira Warenn is like. So you did expect to meet me, if not to talk about Hudson and the genus sus."

"That doesn't lessen the unexpectedness of the pleasure," he said.

"Will it if I—if I tell you I sent Peter there, intending that you should find him and bring him back?"

"No-o." He half-breathed the reply. "But—you can't send a cat. You can't own a cat. The cat owns you, every time."

"And yet, Mr. Green, I sent Peter—and you are here!"

Allure unutterable—it was in her night-dark eyes, in the tempting music of her voice. Gees replied with, "Why, and how did you know my name?" and made the questions harsh, because he was afraid of her.

"Why?" she echoed the question with a note of amusement. "Because I wanted to know what sort of man Jerome Naylor asked to drive me out. And your name—and address—were lying on the post-office counter for anyone to see, when I went in for cigarettes."

He produced his cigarette case with the suddenness of a conjuring trick, and held it opened before her.

"Do have one," he offered.

She shook her head as a grizzled, elderly man came round the corner of the house and advanced toward them.

"Have you fed Adolphus, Ephraim?" she asked.

He said, "Yes'm," and pulled at his scanty forelock in a way reminiscent of half a century or more ago.

"Thank you. I'll attend to Irene, later—you may go. Good-night."

"Good afternoon, 'm," he corrected severely, and turned to tramp off toward the village, with just a glance at Gees as he went.

"Adolphus being— Or am I not supposed to question?" Gees asked.

"Being an illustration of the truth of Hudson's theory—a boar," she answered. "But don't you think we have talked long enough on my doorstep? Jerome Naylor would—if he knew, he'd go baresark."

Gees managed to take the revelation of that final sentence with a poker face, though inwardly he questioned whether she had used the last word with no special meaning, or had intended to tell him that she knew all about Naylor's obsession. He glanced at his wrist watch and, turning his head momentarily, saw how shadows were deepening in the folds of the hills. If he made the main road before dark, he would be more than lucky—or might break a spring and be unlucky.

"Quite right," he said. "I've detained you long enough, and won't trespass any more. So—goodnight, Miss Warenn."

"I didn't mean that!" She spoke with the first note of emphasis of any kind that he had

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heard in her voice. "I was going to suggest that you come in and try my cowslip wine before going on. As a—as a sort of expression of gratitude for bringing Peter back. I know he's grateful too—tell him so, Peter!"

Slowly, lazily, Peter uncurled himself from about her neck, where he had lain all the while, and dropped to the ground to yawn and stretch himself, and then pad in leisurely fashion until he was directly in front of Gees. There he sat up, and looked up, almost as if asking a question. Gees, looking down at him, nodded the answer.

He said, "All right, Peter—you win. And if I go back to the village, Miss Warenn—" he looked up at her again. "I suppose the pub could put me up, or shake me down for the night?"

"Harry Todd will be glad of you," she assured him. "So—" A gesture, inviting him to enter, finished the sentence.

He had to stoop to cross the threshold. When she had closed the door, Peter having made up his mind to enter too, the low-ceiled, narrow hallway of the house was almost in darkness, for there was no transom, and only the faint light from a doorway on the right relieved the gloom. Through that doorway he followed the girl, to a room of which he could have touched the ceiling without raising his arm to its full stretch, and, since she said, "Just one minute, please," and left him alone there, he had time to take in the quality of the room.

With the exception of one piece, the furniture was mid-Victorian, shabby and valueless. There was a claw-legged, circular table in the middle of the room, its bare surface scratched and dingy. The four dining chairs and one carving chair, mahogany-framed, were horse-hair seated. The black marble clock on the mantel, and its flanking ornaments, were late nineteenth century abominations—and the clock had stopped. A four-tiered bookcase along the wall facing the window was evidently of deal, painted and grained to a bad imitation of oak. It was not merely filled, but crowded with books—Gees recognised the volumes of "The Golden Bough," and Eliphaz Levi's treatises, without making any close inspection of the shelves. The one piece of furniture that contrasted with the rest attracted him more than the bookcase, and he went to stand before it. A black chest—at first he thought it was ebony—with three-panelled front, a keyhole which suggested an enormous lock, and a lid on which were carved, in low relief, three trees.

Bending over to look closely at them, Gees saw that they were thorn trees, with bunches of berries on their branches, and, in spite of the lack of colour—for the carving was black as the rest of the chest's surface—the work was so finely done that the trees seemed alive. And now, with his eyes close to the wood, Gees saw that it was oak, age-darkened to blackness and its graining smoothed to a silken gloss.

Here was a surface that no polish nor artificial staining could have produced. Centuries had gone by since the artist—for artist in truth he must have been—had looked on his work and seen that it was good. For only by age and human touch may oak be brought to such perfection of surface as Gees saw here: other woods may be surfaced by tools and artificial means, but oak retains the indentations of its grain under such treatment, and darkens and takes on a glacial evenness only in the course of ages.

HE STOOD erect and turned, conscious that he was no longer alone, though he had not heard the girl enter the room. She put down on the centre table an ugly, squat black bottle, and two stemmed wine-glasses, of which the stems were mere threads, and the bowls of paper thinness.

She said, "I made the wine. Taste it."

He watched her fill the glasses: the fluid was ruby-dark, and, as he saw it rise oilily in one glass and then the other, he remembered MacMorn, maker of shadows, and the reason-destroying drink that had made an hour of Elysian illusion for him and one other.

He said, "I have been admiring that oak chest of yours."

"Yes?" There was a reflective note in the half-question, and as she spoke she held out one of the filled glasses to him. "All we have left to us, the chest and what is in it."

"All you have left?" he asked. "I don't see—"

"Try my wine," she suggested, and held up her own glass to the light. "They say Dark Lagny made wine like this. Try it."

He held up his glass as she was holding hers, and saw that the deep red, translucent fluid was not remaining still in it, but that a moving current circled from top to bottom and from bottom to top of the glass. He said, "It looks perilously alive, to me."

"Pure imagination on your part. Still!" She waved her free hand toward his glass, and the movement within it ceased.

"I shall soon begin to believe—" he breathed, rather than spoke, and did not end it, but stared at her. The dark eyes laughed at him, though her lips did not curve. There was mockery in the laugh.

"Jerome Naylor?" she asked. "Believe, then. I drink! To all who believe beyond the sight of the eyes, know more than they are taught—

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whose lives of yesterday give them guidance for to-day."

"That is, to yourself," he said, and laughed. "Yes, then—to you. And perhaps, in some small measure, to me."

He drank with her, emptied the glass and put it down. The wine was a soft fire, a tingling sensation that effervesced on his tongue—or so it seemed—and, momentarily, gave him an illusion that the girl who faced him was clothed, not in a black dress of to-day, but in some garment that was made of tiny, overlapping plates of gold or polished brass. Only for a moment did the illusion hold, and then he saw her as before, but slightly smiling with her lips, now, while the dark eyes were unlighted, sombre—and surely the room had darkened! He must go back to the inn. In mercy to the car, he must not attempt the deeply shadowed lane, even with headlights on.

"I think—yes, to you too," she said. "I thought it when I saw you looking at the chest there."

"Old, that," he said. "As old as—as what?"

She shook her head. "I know only that it is very old," she answered. "When Jerome Hold-the-Faith Naylor brought his troops to destroy our castle of Troyarbour—the Naylors built their Hall with the stones of the castle—when he completed our ruin, the Warenn of that day saved only the chest and what it holds. Nothing else—we lost all but that—and the last Naylor lives there to-day."

"The chest and what it holds," Gees mused aloud.

"This Naylor would give half his possessions for what it holds," she told him. "When my father was dying, he came here to get what is in the chest. Threatened to turn me out if I would not give it up. I did not give it up, and Jerome Naylor went away afraid. He is still afraid. That is why he sent for you. I know."

He wanted to ask how she knew. Instead, he asked, "What is in the chest, then—what is it he wants so much?"

Passing him, she went to the chest and lifted its lid. He turned and looked inside, saw the massive, antique lock, and down within the chest rolls of parchment, tape-tied—ten or more of them—together with a white-handled axe, of which the head had rusted to a brownish black, and a long, heavy sword, cross-hilted and unscabbarded, of which the blade was shining, bluish-tempered steel, apparently.

"Can you read runes?" the girl asked abruptly.

"With difficulty," he answered. "It depends on the script, too."

"Yes. The handle of that axe—it is narwhal horn, I understand—is covered with them. Twice covered. Dark Lagny began the record, inscribing round and round the haft, and then it was carried on and on, till the last of it is scribed lengthways of the shaft, crossing the first characters as people used to cross the writing in their letters. You may take it out, if you like."

He lifted the axe and poised it to test its balance. The head, he saw, was deeply eaten with rust, which had been oiled over at some time. The haft was of shining bone, yellowed with age, but still having its tensile strength. Its end widened to a knob to give good grip, and was pierced for a wrist-thong. And from end to end the haft was covered with incised characters that Gees knew as runes, lengthways and crossways of the shaft, and so small and intersecting that he could make nothing of them—except for one word that he translated as "Gunnar," near where the haft was set in the head.

"Who was Gunnar—do you know?" he asked.

She took the weapon from him and put it back in the chest. "Since you could read that, you might read more—more than I wish," she said. "And that—the axe—is what Jerome Naylor wants but cannot have. All the knowledge Dark Lagny had, knowledge that goes far beyond the sight of the eyes—my father taught me to read the runes when I was only a small child. There are Latin translations of some of them on the parchments, but I keep them only because they are old things—things of value, now. Not—not as I keep the axe and sword."

"Runes on the sword, too?" he asked.

"No—it was forged long later. When the first crusade was being preached, I think. But it is a singing sword—one of Thor's own descendants forged it. Not pure steel, but an alloy—I have seen my father take the point round to touch the hilt, and it springs back, so fine is the tempering. He said—my father said—the smith who forged it alloyed the steel with glass, but that may not be true."

"And may be," Gees said. "Glass is the most elastic substance known, though how it could be alloyed with steel—"

"Many arts are lost," she reflected. "How were the monoliths balanced to stand century after century? And how were tree trunks interwoven to make them unite as they grew, joined into wanted shapes more surely than tools or human hands could join them?"

"And that," he said, "is a new one on me. Welding living trees, apparently. But you said—Thor's own descendant."

"A mighty smith was Thor—no wonder they made him a god." Her soft, deep voice took

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on a dreamy note. "A mighty lover, too. Wolfruna was of his breeding—we go far back—O, very far back! Volsungs and children of the Hammer—" She checked herself and, looking at him, laughed—at herself, he knew. The laugh was music. She said, "The night is darkening on us. How long have we talked?"

"A few seconds," he answered. "Have we really begun to talk?"

"Or is all said?" Her lovely voice was sombre, now. "You know so much, too much, I think." Abruptly she pointed at the squat bottle on the table, a dim thing, now, in the gloom that gathered with night's approach. "More?" she asked, and moved a step toward the table.

"No," he answered resolutely. "That stuff—cowslip wine, you called it. Who ever saw dark red cowslips? Are you a witch, Miss Warenn?"

"I am Dark Lagny's child," she answered. "Why do you call my wine 'that stuff'? Was it so unpleasant to your taste?"

"It was so pleasant that I'm afraid of it, and half afraid of you," he said. "When I took that axe in my hand I felt the hands of others who had held it—killed with it. Did you mean me to feel them?"

She shook her head. "No. It is—you know too much. See beyond the sight of the eyes. I would not have had you feel those hands. I would have Jerome Naylor feel them, but not on the axe-handle. Grasping his hand, leading him out, making him mad—" The last words were whispered, yet they seemed to poise echoing in the gloom.

"Then you are a witch," Gees said harshly.

She faced him, her eyes not far from his own—dark pools of the sea under the light of the full moon, nearly luminous and quite distinctly seen, though the light in the room had almost gone. "Is not every woman a witch?" she asked. "If all of us knew our power! I know, therefore, I am a witch. What of it?"

"So much do you hate Jerome St. Pol Naylor?" he asked.

"That?" The syllable was a mere note of mocking laughter. "Why, it has been in the blood of my people since Dark Lagny hung on a cross outside the wall of Eboracum—since Wulfruna took Sigurd's head on her knees before she bound the hell-shoes on his feet—and kissed the blood from his dead lips! Hate? It is more than hate!"

He said, "I'm going, Miss Warenn. I've stayed too long, talked too much—where did you get those marvellous glasses, though?"

She laughed. "Must you know everything? A Varangian brought them from Byzantium. All that I have is old—I too am very old—"

"Harry Todd—wasn't that the innkeeper's name as you said it?" he interrupted. For now the gloom had so far deepened that he saw her face only as a framing for the eyes that retained their distinctness, and her night-black hair blended into the shadows behind her.

"That is his name," she answered. "I shall see you again, then?"

"I don't know. To tell you the truth, I hope not."

"Afraid of me?" She laughed, softly and amusedly.

"Good night, Miss Warenn."

He got out to his car, somehow, and turned to drive back to the village of Troyarbour and The Three Thorns. As he drove, it seemed that the soft music of her laughter pursued him, and on the gloom of approaching night he saw twin pools of deeper darkness—the luminous mystery of her eyes.

She was a witch. Yes, she was a witch!

THE light had just begun to fail when Ephraim Knapper entered the barroom of the Three Thorns and clacked across the red-brick floor in his heavy, hob-nailed boots to face Harry Todd, the proprietor, with whom business was not brisk enough to justify his keeping a barman. There was only this one bar, a fairly large room with the old-style conventional sand on the floor, and earthenware spittoons available for such as felt inclined to use them. But, following on the campaign against tuberculosis, nobody spat, in these days. The earthenware vessels were mere ornaments, the sand a superfluity.

Four worthies, who made the pub a club, as did Ephaim Knapper, occupied a bench on the right—that is, in relation to the door—as he entered. They gave him grave greeting: Sam Thatcher, immediately facing the door, nodded and grunted—he was simon-pure Dorset. Phil Hodden grunted without nodding. Jacob Cowder, third along the bench, said, "'Do, Ephraim," and Fred Carphin, nearest the bar, merely grinned and pointed at his glass, of which not more than a fifth of the contents remained. As a scrounger, Fred had a reputation, and Ephraim knew it—had had years in which to learn it. He shook his head mutely, and spoke to Harry Todd.

"One ha'fpint, Mr. Todd. Look like a fisher throwed a line, but I ain't rizin'. One ha'f pint, I do tell 'ee."

Todd drew the half-pint from the barrel back of the bar, and had to loosen the spile-pin to fill the glass. Ephraim put down his pennies, took up the glass, and meandered slowly to the table at which the four sat. He seated himself on the bench facing them all.

"Heer's to I," he said, and drank.

"Theer were a furriner tu the Hall," Sam

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Thatcher observed with the gravity of one imparting weighty news. "In a moty-car. Yu zeed 'un?"

"Aye," said Ephraim, with equal solemnity.

"He went back, happen it were a hour zince," Sam pursued.

Into the following silence Ephraim Knapper launched his bombshell. "The furriner took Peter hoam," he said. "He were standin' talkin' wi' Miss Warenn, a front o' the house, an' I left 'em talkin' arter she towd me I might goo an' said good night tu me."

"Goddlemighty!" Sam Thatcher made the comment after a lengthy silence. "If Zquire heerd that, now!"

"Happen the furriner coom to make it oop atween 'em," Jacob suggested. "Squire can't git her outer the farm, zo—" He left it incomplete.

"Happen pigs might fly," Sam remarked caustically.

"Peegs—aye," Jacob said, to cover a certain discomfiture. "That theer owd boar at the farm started talkin' yit, Ephraim?"

"Next tu it," Ephraim admitted. "She'll let it out an' goo round the farm, an' it'll foller her jest like a sheep-collie. Du anything she tell it. 'Dolphus! An' the sow's nearly as bad."

"What she can't du wi' animals beeant noobery's business," Fred Carphin stated. "When I were theer at the farm afore you, Ephraim, that theer Peter were a little kitten, an' near as sune as it'd lap milk she'd make 'en set up like sayin' prayers."

The opening of the bar door reduced them all to silence, for a stranger—the stranger, evidently—entered and, closing the door again, advanced to the bar, where Harry Todd had been leaning to enjoy the conversation of his regular customers. Discussion of local affairs among them in the hearing of a furriner was utterly taboo. They sat mute, and waited to learn what had brought him to the inn.

He faced Todd, who gave him a courteous "Good-evenin', sir," and straightened from his leaning posture in anticipation of an order.

"Good evening," Gees responded cheerfully. "I was recommended to you by a resident here. Mr. Todd, isn't it?"

"I'm him," Harry admitted—rather cautiously, since he was not easy in his mind over the observance of closing hours and a surreptitious dilution of spirits sold over the bar.

"Ah!" Gees smiled at him. "Do you think you could stable my car for me and give me a bed for the night, Mr. Todd?"

"Why, cert'ny, sir," he answered with far more cordiality. "That is, if ye don't mind runnin' the car inter my open shed at the back—stand it next the wagon."

"Splendid! I'll go and run the car into the shed, and then come back here. You might have a pint of bitter waiting for me."

He went out. The five habitués looked at each other, and Sam Thatcher nodded with a world of meaning in the gesture. Harry Todd drew a pint of bitter, and placed it on the bar.

Then Gees came back. He put down a shilling with "Thank you, Mr. Todd," and placed on the brick floor beside him the small suitcase he had taken from the car. Then he took up the glass tankard and drank, and drank, to put it down again empty, while the eyes of the worthies widened as they stared in silent wonderment.

"Very good bitter," Gees observed. "I'll have another like that, now it's washed the dust away. Yes, excellent bitter. A free house?"

"'Tis that, sir," Todd assented, busy at the barrel.

"Makes all the difference," Gees remarked, and, noting the change from his shilling, put down enough coppers to complete payment for the second pint. "And you're not a native to these parts, eh?"

"Been here twenty year, sir. I was born an' bred Winchester way. But how d'you reckon to know I don't belong round here?"

"By your accent—that's easy," Gees told him. "I'll bet you're still what they call a furriner—and always will be." He turned to look at the five figures, still and silent as dummies, at the table beside the wall. Being interested in what he had already seen of Troyarbour, he wanted to know more, and here, if anywhere, he could learn it, if he could get those five talking.

He said, ingratiatingly, "Our friends here all seem to be near the end of what they've got." And waited till, as he had expected, five pairs of eyes questioned what he might mean.

Then—"Can I ask you all to have drinks with me—anything you like to call?"

THERE was dead silence, while four pairs of eyes turned to those of Sam Thatcher, as doyen of their society, and therefore the one by whose decision they would abide. Sam thought for a few seconds longer, and then replied, "Yazzur, I reckon it be very kind o' yu."

"Take their orders, Mr. Todd, and don't fail to have one yourself at the same time." He put down a ten-shilling note and, taking up his tankard, turned to look round the bar-room. Sam, leader of the five, decided on another ha'f pint, and in turn each of the others followed suit until Fred Carphin, last

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to call, said, "A pint, Mus' Todd," quite boldly, whereat the others almost groaned aloud. The scrounger had got away with it: They also might have had pints, had they had the courage to call for them—but it was too late, now.

"Any flint pits round these parts, do you know?" Gees asked.

Ephraim frowned over the unexpected question, taking it in gradually.

"Flint pits, zur," he echoed eventually. "Aye. Thur be one oop back o' Wren's. 'Tis all blackb'ries, now."

"Dewberries, Ephraim," Sam Thatcher corrected severely.

"Brumbles, anyway," Ephraim said.

"You spoke of Wren's," Gees observed. "Where is that?"

"Why, wheer Miss Wren du live now," Ephraim answered. "You seen her, I know. You an' she was talkin' when I left to-night. Arternoon, it wur then. Her people had that farm f'r everlastin'."

"Not all that, Ephraim," Sam corrected him "The Hall, it wur the Wrens', afore Zquire Naylor—zome owd Zquire Naylor long back—avore Naylors come theer."

"Yes, I did see Miss Warenn," Gees admitted with a thoughtful intonation. "I took her cat back from the Hall."

"Peter's moz'ly wanderin'," Sam Thatcher observed rather sadly—and Gees knew, by the free comment, that he was admitted, strictly on furriner status, to their fraternity. He said, sagely, "Cats mostly do. They're never really tame."

"'Less Miss Wren gits howd on 'em," Fred Carphin amended. "She'd taame the davvle hisself, I rackon. She got a owd boar up theer, an' yu'd rackon it wur a dawg, way it foller her around."

"A boar pig?" Gees made it an incredulous query.

"Aye, a boar peeg," Fred confirmed him enthusiastically. "An' a owd sow, as'll du all 'tis towd—by her, mind, not by noobery else. Peegs, minding what they'r towd! An' 't'aint only that. I've heerd her laugh!"

He made of the last sentence no more than a fearful undertone, and looked to right and left as if he feared he might be overheard. Sam Thatcher said, "It don't du f'r a mon tu hev tu many pints," and Phil and Jacob chuckled at the hit. But Fred spoke mulishly, "I tell 'ee, I've heerd her laugh, when she'm been miles away. Like—like a ghoast. Lordy, don't I know? I worked theer f'r her father yeers enough, an' f'r her tu, afore Ephraim took my place. I've heerd it."

"An' what du yu think made her laugh?" Sam inquired caustically.

"Us wur talkin' about her," Fred explained sulkily, and went silent.

Sam shook his head. "Tu many pints," he said.

In the utter silence that followed, Gees noted the disapproval on the faces of the other four. Fred had outraged all manners and rules of good society. He had talked about his late employer before a stranger. He had talked of local things before that stranger, which was never done in Dorset. And, in attempting to create a sensation, he had obviously lied.

Condemnation of such a one was unanimous and bitter.

Then, into the silence, came a sound that Gees recognised with a little, fearful thrill, a sense of the uncanny. From somewhere near the door it came, deep-toned and musical, the sound of Ira Warenn's laughter. There are voices that are unmistakable, even in laughter, and he knew this as her laugh, though he had only seen and talked with her for an hour or less. Almost involuntarily he turned his head to see no more than had been there since he entered for the second time. And then he noted that all other eyes had turned toward the laugh—he had heard, not imagined that he heard it.

"Theer!" Fred Carphin ejaculated, and pointed. "'Tis—theer!"

"A boord craaked," Sam Thatcher said—but there was no conviction in the statement. "I heer en. It wur a boord."

"Wheer?" Fred demanded, with angry defiance. "Theer's bricks underfoot in heer, an' the walls—they'm brick, else lath an' plaster. That theer door ain't moved, I'll take my oath. She laughed!"

"Fred Garphin!" Sam Thatcher's voice had in it angry authority. "Yu'm zaid enough—an' moor. Mister—whatever yu're name be—we beg yure pardon for this furriner from Zuzzex—" He put stinging, bitter emphasis on the word. "An' we hoap yu unnerstand we niver heerd the like i' Troyarbour afoore. Talkin' o' a laady ahind hur back—they du zay yu got to know a man yeers, an' then yu don't rightly know him—an' 'tis true. Niver till this night ded I know Fred Carphin, an' now I don't wanter know him no moor. Zuzzex boorn!"

Fred put the tankard down on the table, edged out from behind it, and went to the door. Opening it, he stood holding the handle.

"She did laugh!" he said, and went out.

Again a dead silence, and, again, into it, came the deep, musical sound of laughter—and Gees saw Sam Thatcher's jaw drop as he stared in fear, and Todd craned over his bar, and Jacob Cowder stood up to stare fearfully

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at the door. The silence held for a full minute after the weird laughter had ceased, and then Gees moved toward the bar.

"One more pint, I think, Todd," he said easily, "and if any of these chaps would like another, or a stiff whiskey to steady him and stop him from hearing things, you can put it on me."

"But she did laugh, sir," Todd said, in an awed way.

"Aye." From behind Gees, Sam Thatcher echoed it. "She ded laugh."

"Is—that—so?" Gees put all the mockery he could into the question. "Then, whoever she is, ask the lady to step forward, and I'll buy her a drink."

He stood quite still and cocked his ear, so to speak. Todd, with the empty glass from the table in his hand and the orders registered in his mind—easily, for they had all called for pints—also stood still, and gazed unhappily toward the door. The best part of a minute went by, and then Gees put his tankard on the bar.

"The lady will not oblige," he said. "In fact, we're all hearing what didn't happen, and waiting for it to happen again. Death and the income tax are the only real things in life, and nobody like realities.

"I'll have a double whiskey with a dash of soda. Then cook me some ham and eggs, and tell whoever does the cooking not to laugh. It's not safe."

He said no more. The four worthies puzzled over what he had said, and made nothing of it. Todd served the drinks, drew one for himself, and then went out to order the cooking, and, until he returned, not a word was spoken in the bar-room. Then Sam Thatcher lifted his pint.

"I dunno when I drunk zo much f'r naw-then," he said, "an' fr'm a furriner, tu. But a right good furriner yu be, mister, though us doan't understan' ha'f what yu been talkin'. Heer's tu yu."

"Good health," Gees responded, rather absently. He was thinking, then, of Ira Warenn and the two laughs. He would not leave Troyarbour yet. It promised to be interesting.

"She ded laugh," Sam said, with solemn conviction.

TODD himself conducted Gees to a bedroom which, though small, looked comfortable and adequately furnished—surprisingly so, for such an out-of-the-world hamlet as this—and observed that the door on the right at the foot of the stairs led to the coffee room, where the ham and eggs would be ready by the time Gees got there. Also pickled onions, Dorset butter, and cheese—the best he could do.

Quite good enough, Gees told him, and with that he went out. Later, following him down the stairs, Gees opened the indicated door to face an attractive-looking girl in her twenties, who, evidently, had been just about to emerge. As he stood back to make way for her, she too stood back in a sort of confused hesitancy, as if she had been caught where she ought not to be, and he had time to take in her ensemble, as he would have put it. The green rayon blouse clashed with the beige skirt. The skirt was none too long, and revealed shapely legs, and her shoes were dainty and high-heeled. She was blond, but needed another visit to her hairdresser, for the roots of her hair were obviously darkening. Her eyes were palish blue, and too closely set, while she had slightly overdone her makeup. Yet there was a certain attractiveness about her, especially in her nervous embarrassment. She had tried to make the best of herself, and had failed through lack of taste and colour sense. Had she tried less, she would not have failed so badly.

Gees said, "Sorry," and held the door for her. She passed him with—"I've put your supper on the table, sir," and in the one sentence betrayed Cockney origin. Then she escaped, her heels clicking on the oilcloth, and Gees went to the table and uncovered his meal. The ham had been generously cut, and there were four eggs.

Seating himself, Gees began business, reflecting the while over the girl, over the laugh in the bar, his determination to see Naylor again before leaving this place, and equally strong determination not to see any more of Ira Warenn. She might be interesting—was interesting, in fact—but he felt sure she would prove dangerous, and so resolved to avoid her. He was a little afraid of her, in fact.

Taking the second pair of eggs on to his plate after disposing of the first two, he realized that something was missing, and, espying a hand-bell on the table, took it up and rang it vigorously. Almost as if he had been waiting for the summons, Todd appeared.

"I hope everything is all right, sir," he asked, before Gees could speak—and he looked at the empty dish and refilled plate.

"Nearly too good to be true," Gees told him, "but the odd spot of fluid would come in handy. From the barrel. A pint, I think."

"Right away, sir. I can get tea, if you'd like it."

"From the barrel, Todd," Gees repeated gently, and Todd went out.

To return with one of the glass tankards, and a napkin over his arm with which he

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"You can see stark evil walking the earth today. . . ."

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wiped the base of the vessel before setting it down. By that time, Gees had pushed his plate aside and reached for the cheese—and Todd moved the jar of pickled onions to handiness for him.

"After which," he observed, "I shall be in a fit state to breathe on my friends. You've been here quite a while, Todd."

"And still they reckon me a furriner, sir. Always will."

"How on earth did you find the place?"

"'Twas the missus's doin', sir. She was a downland girl when I married her, an' allus hankered for the downs. Didn't bother about the loneliness—it is lonely when winter sets in, too—so I took this when I heard it was goin'. I useter hanker for the towns an' lights at first, but by-an'-bye I got used to it—there's a sort of drawin' power about the downs. They—they get you."

"I understand," Gees said. "And a free house, too."

"That is so. Not much of a trade, but I was in a tied house before, an' there's something about a free house—so when the missus died—five year an' more ago, it was—I felt I didn't wanter go. An' here I am—here I'll most likely finish, too."

"A lone widower." Gees remembered the girl with the high heels. "Any children—if I'm not asking too much?"

"No, sir, you ain't. An' we had only a baby that died before it was a month old. No, a lone widower, as you say."

"Umm'!" Gees commented reflectively, while he thought, but did not say—"Not so very lone," as he remembered that would-be entrancing vision which he had passed on the way to the dining room.

"That was rather an unpleasant little dust-up in the bar," he said. "The man—Carphin, wasn't it?"

"That's the name, sir."

"Used to work where Ephraim Knapper works now, I understand?" Gees suggested, and made a half question of it.

"That's so, sir. He was theer i' the owd man's time, Mister Wren that had the farm till he died. It was Miss Wren got rid o' Fred i' the finish. He was—well, it ain't for me to say, but she turned en out sharp one day, an' the hens seemed to lay better ever since."

"Maybe he wasn't sympathetic enough—to the hens," Gees observed. "Anyhow, it's your confidence, Todd, and it stays in this room. And—you heard that laugh, I noticed. Both times, eh?"

Todd nodded.

"If it was," he said, "I dunno. Queer, it was."

"The first time it happened?" Gees asked. "Or have you—"

"No, sir—never before. Look like Fred'd heard it, by what he said. Maybe it was—her—up to tricks. Though why—it beats me."

"She gets up to tricks, then?" Gees inquired, leading the man on.

"I wouldn't say that, sir," Todd answered—honestly enough, as Gees could see. "Folk hereabout say since her father died she's got inter queer ways, but it don't take much to make Sam Thatcher's sort say all sortser things about anyone. All I know is Squire Naylor'd about give his ears to get her outer the farm, an' can't. Things get about, y'know, sir.

"Fred's daughter Nettie—she's parlourmaid up at the Hall, an' a right smart bit o' goods, too—she'll tell her mother things, the mother'll tell Fred, Fred'll get a drop too much, like to-night, an' then—well, things get about. So ain't lettin' out no secrets. Squire Naylor's scared of her, an' that's a fact."

"Why?" Gees asked, reflecting the while that Fred Carphin's tongue was not more loosely swivelled—if as much so—than that of the man before him. "What is there to be scared about?"

Todd shook his head doubtfully. "She—she ain't ordinary," he said. "The way she'll handle animals—there was never anything like it, as I know. Why—four year ago, it'd be—Abram Timms had a bull. Timms' farm *jines on to Wren's, you must know, sir. That* bull was a killer, if ever there was one—they shot it at the finish, an' nobody in all Troyarbour dast go in the medder where it was, long afore it was shot. But she went! Wanted to cross that medder one day to go to Timms', an' the bull come at her, tail up an' head down. Timms seen it, an' knew she hadn't a hope on earth—she was a good as dead. An' she stopped an' faced the bull, an' it pulled up a score of yards away from her, lookin' all dazy, sorter—Timms'll tell you the tale any day. She went up to the bull—maybe she spoke to it—nobody don't know what she did.

"But the finish was she laid her hand on the bull's neck, an' it walked alongside her till they got to the gate, an' then she come out as cool an' cheerful as if she'd been pettin' a turtle dove. That for one thing, an' it ain't natural. Her owd sow an' the little owd boar are as tame an' biddable an' clever as the winnin' dog in sheep trials—they do say the boar is cleverer'n any dog. An' that cat Peter—Peter'll be heer this minute an' gone the next, an' they say she talks to him, like he was human."

"That power over animals is rare, but it

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exists in some people," Gees remarked. "I see nothing in it to scare a man. And now how much do you reckon on making out of me, Todd?"

Todd reflected over it. He said, "Well, sir, there's supper to-night, an' the room, an' there'll be breakfast. We'll say nought about the car, because it ain't usin' up room I want for anything else. An' I ain't got no bathroom i' the place. So—would seven shillin' be too outrageous much to ask, do you think, sir?"

Gees smiled. "Make it out at that," he concurred. "But I suggest that you add in the cost of a pair of really good silk stockings, and don't say they were on my bill when you hand them over."

Staring while comprehension grew, Todd went brick-red.

At last he questioned, "Dud-do you mum-mean that, sir?"

"My middle name is sincerity," Gees answered solemnly.

AGAIN, in mid-morning, the Rolls-Bentley stood before the main entrance of Troyarbour Hall. Again trim, attractive, and rather pert Nettie Carphin ushered Gees into the lofty-ceiled library—a truly magnificent specimen of the architecture of its period, Gees realised—where Jerome St. Pol Naylor rose to his feet from the armchair beside the fireplace as his visitor entered. The room was not merely warm, but hot. The fire, of dimensions which would have neutralised arctic conditions, was an oppression on the mild October day. Naylor looked even frailer than when Gees had seen him the day before, and seemed, salamander-wise, to bask in the stuffy, unnatural heat.

"How-de-do, Mr. Green?" he said, with a satiric note in the greeting. "Am I to conclude from this second call that you have changed your mind? That I can count on your help, as well as your advice?"

"I have most decidedly changed my mind," Gees answered coolly. "That is why I am here, a second time."

"I am very glad to hear it," Naylor said, with no satire at all.

"Uh-huh?" Gees made the exclamation not merely satiric, but derisive. "You've never, of course, been in the position of a defendant consulting his defending counsel, Mr. Naylor?"

"I should hope not!" Naylor exclaimed hastily. "Why, though?"

"Because—I spent two years in the police force, and learned a lot—because the defendant, if he's got any sense at all, generally realises that it's best to tell his counsel the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. It always pays."

"Are you insinuating—" Naylor asked very coldly indeed, and left the query incomplete.

"Nothing," Gees answered calmly, "knowing as I do that a truthful man has nothing to fear from insinuations, and a liar gets round 'em somehow. If I put you in the second class, it's your own fault."

"Will you please leave this room at once, Mr. Green?" Naylor asked.

"No. And I haven't seen anyone here capable of throwing me out, yet. I can be an exceedingly blunt devil, and also a disagreeable one, if I'm hoodwinked, Mr. Naylor. I have seen Miss Warenn since I saw you, and have also heard what she told me confirmed by independent evidence. Why didn't you tell me you threatened her?"

"Will you please leave this room at once?" Naylor repeated.

"No, I tell you! Come off that high horse and be honest. This case interests me, and I want the truth of it. Mean to get it, either for you or against you—and I don't care which. But heaven help you if I'm against you! Why did you threaten the girl?"

"I didn't," Naylor retorted sullenly. "At least—" He broke off.

"In other words, you did," Gees said with stinging incisiveness. "Why? What was it you wanted of her—asked of her?"

"I didn't threaten her half as much as she threatened me," Naylor protested, and so betrayed the justice of Gees' accusation.

"That may be," Gees said, "but in admitting that you threatened her at all, you prove that you misrepresented your case to me yesterday afternoon. I don't like that sort of thing, so I'm here again."

"To—to help, did you say?" Naylor asked apprehensively.

"I have not said so. I want the truth, first. Why did you threaten the girl—what did you want of her?"

"I wanted—the rod of An," Naylor answered, half reluctantly.

"The rodofan?" Gees repeated, puzzledly. "What is it—a patent medicine formula? It's a new one on me."

"The—rod—of—An," Naylor repeated, with evident irritation.

"Ah, now I get you!" Gees said. "An—yes. Capital of Atlantis. The mother of hewn cities, they called it—all hewn from the solid rock, not built above it like cities of to-day—"

"You know?" The interruption had in it all of Naylor's intermittent intensity. How much do you know? How much can you tell me?"

Gees shook his head. "What is this rod?" he asked in reply.

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"The rod? She has it fitted as the shaft of a Viking battle-axe, and doesn't know what she has—doesn't know what is inscribed on it," Naylor answered. "She may have deciphered some of it, but not all, or else—" He broke off, oddly. "I wanted it," he ended, half-apologetically. "I'm sorry I omitted to tell you—you'll help, you say."

"I do not say—anything of the sort," Gees told him forcibly. "I want the truth out of you before I decide on anything. What is there inscribed on this rod, or connected with this rod, that Miss Warenn does not know? If you want my help, you've got to confess everything."

Naylor thought it over, and evidently fought down a rising anger at the dictatorial statement. He said, "The science of Atlantis was far in advance of that of to-day, as perhaps you know."

"So far," Gees concurred, "that the powers who rule the world decided that the whole continent must be destroyed—drowned—because its rulers discovered the secret of creation and gained power over death—and would have misused both discoveries. I know."

"Yes, you know," Naylor admitted. "That is obvious. Whether either of those secrets was inscribed on the rod is more than I can tell, but I do know, what she does not, that there is on it enough to give not merely knowledge, but control of what is generally called the fourth dimension. The fifth, really. Time is the fourth."

"That is to say," Gees said slowly, "for human comprehension any object must possess four dimensions: length, breadth, thickness, and duration. Yes, all that is alphabetical, if you get me. The fifth?"

"For that—" Naylor forgot his anger, and Gees' judgment on him, in his interest in the subject, "it would be better to take an analogy, since neither you nor I can visualize this fifth dimension, living as we do in a four-dimensional state—counting in time or duration as one of the four, I mean. That is generally conceded, now."

Gees took out his cigarette case and offered it, and Naylor took one, as if from his oldest friend rather than from a man who had only recently insulted him. Gees said, "This promises to be very interesting indeed, but I think you've made one mistake in it."

"Do sit down!" Naylor accepted a light, and pointed to a chair. "Hunter—Hunter of Denlandham—told me I might depend on you, and though—if you'll forgive my saying it—you have damned irritating ways, I believe he was right. This—this analogy—I always resort to it for comprehension of the fifth dimension. Picturing, which is fairly easy, a two-dimensional state, considering the two dimensions of length and breadth, and presupposing the possibility of consciousness in such a state. Since we live in more than two dimensions, we can comprehend living in those two, by an effort of imagination. But why—in what do you say I am wrong?"

"Let's leave that alone, for the present," Gees said in answer. "Give me your theory—I think I know it, but you state it, all the same. I'm interested—this looks like being a case, to me."

But whether he would take up that case for or against Jerome St. Pol Naylor, he did not say. He had in mind the fact that the man had lied to him at the outset, and also had in mind the laughs he and others had heard in the bar-room of The Three Thorns. That laugh, though there was in it no proof, was evidence that Ira Warenn had mastered the secrets inscribed on this "rod of An," and had got control of what Naylor chose to term a fifth dimension.

"I will certainly state my theory," Naylor said, with, for him, marked cordiality. "It is—what shall I call it—an exposition of the new magic, which derides and nullifies the old."

"Is—that—so?" Gees mocked the statement, deliberately. "If our newest scientists were aware of all that the very old ones called magic, the world would be one hell of a way farther advanced than it is to-day. The very newest magic is old—etheric vibrations were used for transmitting messages when mankind was in its infancy—and we brag about the discovery of wireless transmission! How old is the telescope or explosive propellant? How old is the steam engine? No man to-day knows what electricity actually is, but the sages of Atlantis could give you the formula—and even the later Lemurians knew how a cat purrs, a thing no scientist can tell you to-day. Now go ahead—I want your two-dimensional exposition. To get your idea of it all."

He settled himself in the chair Naylor had indicated, and drew a long breath, expressive of enjoymnet. He had practically insulted the man, and then had gained his point.

Naylor said deliberately, "I don't think I could tell you anything you don't know."

"Try," said Gees.

CHAPTER III

EMPIRIC THEORY

NAYLOR sat hesitant. Was this cool, masterful devil inwardly laughing at him? There was nothing new about his theory, but it had been enunciated years ago, formed the mere A B C of the subject.

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"The two-dimensional analogy, then," he said slowly, "considering length and breadth as the two dimensions. You get a plane surface, with its boundaries at right angles to each other—perpendicular to each other. And a surface has no thickness—in that two-dimensional state there is no such thing as height or depth—thickness. It is inconceivable, on a two-dimensional plane."

"You may say," Gees put in for him, "that the surface of which you speak has no more thickness than has a shadow cast by the sun."

"An admirable way of putting it," he conceded, and felt, more than ever, that he was talking to this man before him as if he himself were an infant—that Gees knew more than he did. Still, he went on. "We now imagine a two dimensional life—intelligent life—on that plane surface. Being two-dimensional, it has no consciousness of a third dimension, does not know there is such a thing as height above the surface, or depth beneath it. It can travel in the two directions of length and breadth, but it cannot lift itself the minutest fraction of an inch above the surface on which it lives. It simply does not know there is an 'up' or a 'down' beyond its two-dimensional world."

"Quite lucid, so far," Gees commented again, and Naylor flushed slightly at the implication of the remark. It put him more in the position of a schoolboy reciting a lesson to a master than that of one who imparted information. Still, he forced himself to go on.

"We will now suppose," Naylor said, "that a three-dimensional being comes along, looks down on the two dimensional plane surface, and is enough interested in a two-dimensional being to lift it, even the smallest fraction of an inch, away from the surface on which it lives. No matter how small the lift, the two-dimensional being is instantly and completely out of its world. Since it knows nothing of up or down, it cannot look down and see that world still near. It is lost as completely as you or I would be if we were hurled off the earth's surface into space, altogether out of sight of the earth. Further than that, since neither this being nor the plane on which it has been living has thickness, it may find an entirely different world, only a thousandth part of an inch removed from its own, but still quite distinct from that first plane surface world, and out of sight of it—since the sight of the being does not extend up or down."

"Carry on," Gees urged. "It's all clear."

"Now let's come to the three-dimensional world—ignoring time as the fourth for this illustration. Our three dimensions in space are all perpendicular to each other—length, and breadth, and thickness. They are all the human mind can comprehend and visualise. In three-dimensional geometry, it is impossible to construct a figure with more than three dimensions all perpendicular to each other, and if such a figure could be constructed, the human eye would be incapable of taking it in. Because the human eye is three-dimensional, just as the eye of the two-dimensional being I have been talking about would be incapable of realising the third perpendicular, height. But, though three-dimensional geometry will permit of constructing figures with only three perpendiculars—length, breadth, and height—mathematics show that there is a fourth perpendicular, a dimension at right angles to the three we know. We cannot see it or comprehend it, but it is there."

"And if it were possible to move along that fourth perpendicular, to move in the fourth dimension," Gees amplified the statement, "we could get quite away from any point in the three we know, and—given control of ourselves and our movements in that fourth dimension, re-enter the other three at any point we liked. Which is to say that I could just enter the fourth dimension in this room, vanish from the room, and reappear in London—or New York, or the moon, for that matter. Anywhere within the confines of the earth and its satellite."

"Ah!" Naylor sighed, rather wearily. "You know as much as I do, I see, if not more. But why only the earth and the moon—why not anywhere in the whole universe, that re-entry?"

"Because," Gees told him, "there are dimensions without number, as your mathematics tells you. You can raise two to any power—the cube of it is eight, which is as far as three dimensions will take you, but mathematically you can go to the fourth, fifth, sixth power of two—to as high a power as you like. Now the Adepts of An knew what you do not appear to know, that control of the fourth dimension gives power to move, without using any of the first three dimensions, within the limits of the earth's influence—that is, say, as far as the moon, but no farther.

"If any one of those Adepts could have raised himself to control of the next, fifth dimension of space, he would have had power to move anywhere in the planetary system of our sun—but no one of them ever got that far, and so all their knowledge of that fifth spatial dimension remained empiric. And what control of the sixth would give no man ever knew, or will know, because the human brain is capable of understanding just so much and no more. It is incapable of taking in the potentialities of six dimensions of space—comprehension of them belongs to gods, not to men."

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"Where did you learn about the Atlantean Adepts?" Naylor asked.

Gees shook his head. "Maybe I listened to the wind on the downs, or heard a silence talking. Perhaps I dreamed it all."

"Why gibe at me?" Naylor demanded heatedly.

"Did I? I was not aware of it. I thought we were merely discussing a purely empiric theory, a possibility that man may turn to solid reality—more than solid, since it includes a perpendicular beyond the solid—some day when he is far enough advanced. As far, say, as the Adepts of An, who for all their knowledge could not save their continent when the sixth-dimensional gods finally decided to drown it."

"Are you an Adept?" Naylor asked uneasily.

Again Gees shook his head. "I am a student," he answered. "There have been very few Adepts since—since the first pyramid was built."

"And now—can I count on your help?" Naylor looked up as he asked the question—he had not risen when Gees did, and his anxiety showed in his gaze as it did in his tone.

"In what way do you think I could help?" Gees parried.

"Get—recover for me—the Rod of An, before that woman learns the use of it," Naylor said very slowly. "I will pay—"

"Recover, you said," Gees interrupted. "Was it once yours, then?"

Naylor dropped his gaze—there was that in Gees' eyes which he did not like to see. Gees waited, and by mere will power compelled the man to look up at him again, after a long interval.

"No," Naylor said, and the word was patently dragged from him.

"I see." Under the irony of the comment Naylor literally writhed. "You know perfectly well Miss Warenn would never give up that Rod of her own free will. You ask me to become a common thief, and offer to pay me for it. I'd sooner turn—"

"No!" Naylor started to his feet with the shrill exclamation. "Bribe her, anything—help me! I'm afraid, man—she's taken all but my reason, and she's making spells to take that too! Help me!"

Gees said, "No," and made the one syllable definite and final.

"You—you saw her yesterday," Naylor almost whispered. "Will you—do you mean you will help her?"

"No," Gees said again. "Neither of you. The feud began with Wulfruna, it seems, ancestress of you both—Dark Lagny intensified it. Now you two are left—you two only. Fight it out between you—I'm going back from here to London and everyday sanity. Now!"

With no further word at parting he turned and went to the door. There, though, he turned, and fired out, "How did you know I saw Miss Warenn yesterday? Do you keep spies here in Troyarbour?"

"Nettie—" Naylor blurted out the one word, as if he would deny the accusation of spying, and then stopped, knowing what he had revealed.

Gees said, "Get Nettie to help you—she seems to fulfil more than her obvious purpose here." And went out, furious.

WHEN he seated himself at the wheel of the car, he cooled a little. On such a day as this the drive to London would be a pleasure, and probably Miss Brandon would have some other, saner case waiting for him to take up—something to sharpen his wits and make him forget this tiny hamlet tucked away in the folds of the downs, where laughs came out from nothingness and an otherwise sane man feared spells such as went out of fashion centuries ago. He let the car gently down to sight of the inn and village. He had no use for Naylor, on the one hand. Ira Warenn had no need of him, on the other. Straight through, out to the main road, and away. He had finished with Troyarbour.

A face looked out from the window of the room in which he had last slept, as he passed—looked out momentarily, and as he turned his head, vanished. A pity the girl blonded her hair like that. By the look of the root ends, there would be red shades in it if she left it alone. Well, let her keep at it. Hair with red shades was for girls like Eve Madeleine, girls of innate fineness and real worth, not for common little things like this innkeeper's sweetheart. Yes, let her go on blonding!

He let his mind dwell on Eve Madeleine—the perfect secretary. No, though—Eve Madeline the woman. She did not care one hoot about him as man, he felt certain. She had known of various adventures in emotion through which he had lived in consequence of these cases of his, when girls had fallen for him, and it had made no difference to her cool acceptance of all that he asked of her, no difference to the manner in which she met him day by day. She was quietly friendly, never resenting his moods or eccentricities, but suiting herself to them all the time. Chestnut hair with red shades in it, like sunlight on foliage in autumn: long-lashed, lovely eyes, and a restful, deep-

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cadenced voice—a voice to remember. Supposing Eve Madeleine—

"Oh, hell! She's Miss Brandon to me. Always must be."

He came out from his reverie, and wrenched at the steering wheel. He was almost abreast of the lone farmhouse, from which emanated no sign of life. But, in the middle of the way he wanted to go, lay Irene the sow, contentedly asleep and round her the litter of piglets rooted at the grass, grunted, chased each other, and utterly ignored the juggernaut advancing toward them—at a crawl, for Gees wished to kill none of them. He blared a warning at them, and they wouffed and, one and all, faced the source of the sound in curiosity rather than fear. Then Gees saw that, if he swung off the laneway on to the grass in front of the house, he could pass them and their somnolent mother.

The radiator lifted, swung toward the house. Round from the back came a smallish, sturdy, bristly-backed animal with a fearsome tusk protruding on each side of its jaw. It snuffed the wind—saw it, perhaps, as in some parts is said to be possible for swine—and then, advancing, planted itself squarely in front of the slowly advancing car, and said—"Urr-wouff!" In human language—"No, you don't!" or so it sounded to Gees. He stopped, puzzled, and a streak of black lightning came from nowhere, and with one mighty leap landed on his back and clung, claws deeply sunken through fabric to skin, to hold him there.

"Blast you, Peter!" Gees exclaimed, and lifted his hand to remove the cat. But Peter chewed at the lifted fingers, very gently, and began to purr. He rubbed, and Gees' hat fell over his eyes.

When he had got it off, he saw Ira Warenn standing in the farmhouse doorway. Not so much standing as leaning against the doorpost, weak with much laughter. But he felt like anything but laughter.

"What is this—a circus?" he snapped out angrily.

She stood erect. "The only way to stop you," she answered. "You meant to go, and not come back, I know."

"And still mean it," he retorted, trying to lift Peter down. But the cat sat claw-tight, and Gees desisted. It was too painful.

She came out from the doorway and stood beside the car. "Please, no," she said. "A little while—an hour? Won't you?"

Some wistful note in the request changed his mind for him. It was weak, he knew: he had not meant to see her again, but there stood the boar in front of the radiator, gazing steadily at it as if he would let it run him down rather than budge. There on Gees' shoulders sat Peter, and Sinbad's old man never clung more tightly than the cat. And there stood Ira Warenn, pleading—the witch pleading!

Slowly Gees got out and faced her, and Peter, moving round from his back, leaped to her shoulder to sit on it, waving his tail like a black pennon of triumph. If he stuck his claws in to balance himself on alighting, she did not flinch. Perhaps he landed clawlessly.

Gees asked, "Why?" and did not amplify it.

She said simply, "To save me the trouble of coming to you."

"Why should you? What have I to do with you, or you with me?"

"To find that out, I stopped your car," she replied.

"Planted this menagerie in my way, you mean?" Anger sounded in the half-assertion, half-question, and his gaze emphasized it.

She raised her voice slightly to say, in an authoritative, almost peremptory fashion—"Irene—go away! Adolphus, to heel!"

THE sow got up and ambled off round to the back of the house, her family following and disappearing with her. The boar advanced, took a distant sniff at Gees, which betokened curiosity, and then went behind his mistress and sat on his hunkers like a well-trained dog. Gees noted that, unlike the average hog, the beast was scrupulously clean. He was smallish and lean, with a hint of reversion to wild type about him, and his flanks and quarters betokened more power of muscle than likelihood of fattening. Hudson's dictum recurred to Gees' mind. Let that boar beget a family, then breed from the best and most intelligent, and the third generation would develop points which would prove the pig's equality with the dog, if not superiority over it.

"Does he light the kitchen fire in the mornings?"

"Invariably." Her deep, dark eyes held mocking lights. "That is, after he has chopped the firewood and blackleaded the grate."

"And now you've made me stop again, I want to know why."

"Because, after seeing Jerome Naylor for the second time, you would not be satisfied if you went away now," she answered, with no mockery at all. "At present, perhaps, you think you would, but your curiosity would grow and grow, and in the end you would come back to see what is happening between Dark Lagny's daughter and Oger's son. And

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I—I do not wish you to come back. I wish to feel that when you go from here, I shall be left in peace to do—as I will."

"With Naylor—do as you will with him," Gees completed for her. "Don't you think 'peace' a rather inappropriate word. You mean war."

"Left in peace to finish my war, then," she amended calmly.

"I see." The comment was acridly satiric. "Do we conduct the interview here, with that bristly gentleman squatting on guard behind you? If so, let's sit on my running board. It's quite clean."

"Will you come in with me, Mr. Green?" she asked coldly.

"Thank you, I will—but it's too early in the day for cowslip wine." He placed himself beside her as, turning toward the house, she left Adolphus to his own devices. When they reached the open doorway, Peter took another leap from her shoulder, landing inside the passage, and streaked up the stairs at the back. Gees heard him padding along oilcloth in some corridor above, and then entered the room he had seen the preceding evening. In full daylight it appeared dingier and less attractive than then, and the oaken chest shone out in greater contrast as its surface reflected the light from the window.

A persistent, singing note sounded and grew in volume as the two entered. The girl turned to Gees, and he saw her lovely eyes wide with fear. The sound grew to a musical, martial clanging, and gradually died away. She went to the chest, lifted the lid, and after looking inside closed it down again. "The sword!" she said, fearfully.

"Any meaning in that solo, then?" Gees asked casually.

"It is the second singing in my lifetime," she answered. "The first was on the day my father died—the day Jerome Naylor came here."

"And you cursed him, I understand," he remarked, still keeping his voice down to casual interest. "M'yes. Who's it singing for, now?"

She shook her head. "No," she said. "I do not know. But it is a dread thing, that singing. For all of Dark Lagny's breed."

She alone was left of Dark Lagny's breed, he reflected but did not say. Instead, he said, "I think I don't like this metropolis. A sword that sings, and a bodiless voice that laughs. Was it bodiless, though?"

She gazed at him steadily, making no reply. The fear had died out from her eyes, now. A tinge of colour changed her paleness.

"You were interested, it appears," he said, "in my going to see Naylor a second time. It was rather an interesting interview. He wants your axe-handle—the Rod of An, he calls it—because of a recipe or formula on it, one you have not yet discovered and he doesn't want you to discover. I am quoting him in saying that."

"He will never have the axe-handle," she said inexorably.

"I told him I thought you felt like that about it, and knew as he talked—it was rather a long talk on his side—that he had made one mistake about you. I knew he had—knew it since last night."

"Yes?" The query betokened only slight interest in his words.

"Yes. In the bar parlour—tap room, or whatever you like to call it—of Todd's inn. If you hadn't discovered that formula, you could never have laughed for all of us in there to hear."

"Isn't that rather an absurd statement?" she asked.

"I think I'll get on my way," he retorted abruptly.

"No—what is it you want me to say?" She was instantly eager, persuasive, even leaning toward him as she stood before the chest. "You believe—what, of me? That I know—"

"I'd say," he answered deliberately, "that if you know all your family tree, you can go back as far behind Wulfruna as she is from you. Back, generation piled on generation, to some family of An in which were Adepts—or was an Adept—of the old cult. From whom the formula on the axe-handle originated, to be handed down and handed down till Dark Lagny scribed it on the handle—for you to decipher. I'd say you have deciphered it, too, having inherited knowledge enough."

"And why the inheritance?" she persisted.

"Well, take your ancestress' description, for one thing. Dark Lagny. So outstandingly dark as to be distinguished by that title among the fair-haired race that bred vikings. Then you, with that dead-black hair and such eyes as I have never seen—Dark Lagny's darkness persists and is reproduced in you. One conclusion only—you are of Azilian descent, and that means Atlantean. Some colony or settlement that escaped when the great inundation happened."

"To what is all this leading?" she asked.

"You have somehow got control or partial control of the fourth dimension in space," he said slowly. "Naylor knows that the secret of it is on the axe-handle—what else is on that bone, heaven and you only know, apparently. Naylor talked of it empirically—theorised. You, I believe, can state it practically—perhaps demonstrate it. I tell you, I've as great a thirst for knowledge as any man living, and I want

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your practical statement of this—this three-dimensional impossibility that you know as real."

She shook her head. "No," she said. And again—"No."

"Then I'll say good morning, and if those pigs of yours get in my way again, I'll drive over them. Good morning, Miss Warenn."

"Wait," she said. "I will tell you."

IRA WARENN pointed at the horsehair-seated carving chair, set back from the window. She asked, "Will you sit there?"

Gees took out his cigarette case and offered it. She took one, and he lighted for her and himself and then took the indicated seat. She perched herself on the edge of the circular, claw-legged table, facing him.

"You want—me," she said reflectively. "All I know and have done and will do. You want to add that to all you already know—to pin me in your specimen case and know yourself so much greater through adding my knowledge to yours. That is so?"

"If you hadn't spread those impediments in front of the car and stopped me, I'd have foregone the knowledge," he answered. "I was going away from here, not to come back."

She shook her head. "You would have come back," she demurred. "I know. I know! Yesterday evening, when I talked to you, I realised you as of those who know, and for all of you the increase of knowing is—you are always questing, all of you, for more. Knowing that you know so little. And you were afraid of me."

She spoke reflectively, slowly, gazing into space. Gees took a long inhalation from his cigarette, and answered—

"Of your magic—if that is the right word."

"It is not. There is no magic—and you know it!"

"That is true," he admitted. "Also it is true what you say—I wanted you—the essential you that can do—what you do. What Naylor told me you have done. I wanted—and wouldn't let myself want—to dissect you, to get at reasons. Why you, being what you are, should waste time and life on such an aim as that old feud. Near Adeptship, obviously, and yet you—I want to know why. I confess it."

"I am not—I shall never be Adept," she said. "That is reached by—prayer and fasting, as the phrase goes. One goes up stage by stage—they went up, painfully and slowly, knowing the final stage would compensate for all they denied themselves. As Adepts they knew all, through patient years of ascent along the path. I come in to the path like a blind child—I know my limitations. I have not paid the price they paid, and so I shall never see, but grope. Nor, I think, reap any profit. You see, I am a woman. You, I think, will yet be Adept. Ten—twenty years hence, perhaps. Thirty years hence—what are years, or what is one life? I am a woman."

"Obviously." He put a tinge of satire into the comment. "And wasting on an old hate, what is, equally obviously, a mentality and breadth of vision given to few women. It is waste!"

He put strong emphasis on the last sentence, realising as he did that she was incredibly beyond and above her setting. Here in this lone hamlet she had the poise and knowledge of a woman of the world twice her age. In the sense in which she had used the words, he wanted her—wanted to know how such a one knew all she knew, and how she knew it. A mere farmer's daughter, on the face of it, yet a seeress, or very near it. Here was a puzzle worth the solving.

"You think it waste," she said, and flicked ash from her cigarette. "You are outside, looking in from the outside on what Jerome Naylor has told you. I—I am Dark Lagny's child—I am Dark Lagny herself, for all I know. You are not yet Adept—how can you judge the power that drives? You want me—to know me and my motive and driving force. You cannot know it, cannot comprehend it. An urge in the blood, driving me—centuries of hate compressed in me. So I tell you. You wanted me, and in so telling you, I reveal myself—you have me."

He shook his head, threw away his cigarette end, and took out another. She too threw her stub into the unlighted fireplace, and as he reached out the case took one and a light after it.

He said, "Not all of you. This is a mere statement. It needs amplifying, before I have all of you. So far, I get your coming in to the Path by a back door, say, stealing what Adepts earn—and for that, of course, you will have to pay, in due course. But how you steal in I can only guess, so far. I want to know, not guess."

"You know, as I know, that there is no magic," she half-questioned.

He nodded. "In the sense that the ignorant of all the ages have seen magic in natural sequences, there is no magic," he agreed. "Do you know, you are a very wonderful woman?"

"I suppose I am." She regarded her cigarette end, and smiled. "Yet I am only a small child, half-blind and groping. On the edge of seeing, yet not seeing fully. It is true—there is no magic. We learn the use of a rule—of a law—and those who do not know the law say that we work magic. Is that not so?"

Again he nodded assent. "Which is why they burned wise men at the stake, in old days,"

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he said. "They could not comprehend. What I cannot comprehend is that you, being of the wise, pursue this feud against Naylor. You might make so much better use of your life."

"I tell you, that is beyond my control. It is my task, say. I shall destroy him in the end, as I have already destroyed all he valued. When I know a little more, have advanced a little more."

"Which means—" A tinge of impatience sounded in the question.

"You know—you accused—there was a laugh," she said very slowly. "It is quite true. I laughed. They were so funny. I had to laugh."

"In other words, you have got control of the fourth dimension in space," he said. "That is what I want of you—we come down to practical fact, now. The first human being, I think, since—"

"Since An became a submarine height," she completed. "Perhaps. The later Adepts did not follow that path. I think, being a woman, that they might have gained more if—but I am a woman, and outside. I cannot see the Path, but grope, having entered it without sight."

"Through what is scribed on the axe-handle —the Rod of An," he suggested. "You have got your knowledge at second-hand."

"You are a very wise man," she told him, and smiled.

"Oh, very!" He smiled too. "You were virtually admitting that you have got control of the fourth dimension. I'd have left you to it, but you stopped me. Now, Miss Warenn, for everything you get out of life there is a price to pay, and my price for your stopping me is a share in this knowledge of yours—of a fourth dimension in space."

"You must risk much," she warned him.

"I think it would be worth it," he answered.

She laughed outright. "You want magic?" she asked. "Have you four years to waste on it? On that one bit of magic?"

"Is it that?" he queried.

"Yes? Magic!" There was derision in the word. "An old woman finds out, or inherits the knowledge, that a certain herb will inspire love in a man. A girl comes to her and asks for a potion that will give her the love of that man. The old woman makes a decoction, the girl induces the man to drink it at an opportune moment, and—magic! There is no magic. It is applied knowledge of cause and effect, whatever the case may be. Jerome Naylor fears my magic, I know, and the fear is a mere proof of his ignorance. I have given five years to this last bit of knowledge, and still I am uncertain, not fully able to use it."

"You suggested four years, I think," he remarked practically. "Now you say it took five. I'm merely asking—before going home."

"Five years—" she took no notice of the gibe —"since I read Dark Lagny's runes on the Rod. And thought myself mistress of the world, when I had fully understood them. Let me take a parallel. Say that you want to learn to skate, and you learn from a book all the rules of skating. You put on skates, and—can you skate?"

"Personally, yes. On your parallel—no," he said.

"So with what I learned. It gave me comprehension of what one must do—you own you want me, and I am giving you myself, in this. I learned, in theory, how to enter the fourth dimension of space, but my three-dimensional mind could make no use of the knowledge. The fourth line on which one must travel—I could not see it."

"I know," he said. "I've spent some hours thinking this over."

"Hours? Five years! My father spent his life, and still dared not experiment. He read the runes, and I had his knowledge to add to mine. Still it was not enough. Else, there had been no Naylor living to-day. Because that is our aim, to end them."

"You bloodthirsty crowd!" Gees ejaculated, half-involuntarily.

THE DOOR, just ajar, was pushed open then, and Peter entered and came to sit looking up at his mistress. She said, "Go to that man, Peter," and pointed at Gees as he sat in the armchair.

But Peter sat, looking up at her, disregarding the command. Then he leaped on the table and seated himself beside her, purring.

"I thought you could control animals," Gees observed caustically.

"To a point," she answered, with no discomfiture at all, and stroked the cat's ears. "Do you know you must never thwart a cat? If you do, you lose all power over it. You must never strike it."

"One thrashes dogs," he observed, "and they're better for it."

"But a cat, never. Peter settled himself in your car—" She broke off, as if she had said too much, and tickled Peter's ears.

"We're getting near it," Gees observed. "Do have another cigarette." The inevitable case opened itself under her eyes.

She shook her head. "Two is enough. Can I offer you—anything?"

"Yes. The conclusion of what you were saying when Peter interrupted us. About those five years, and what you learned."

"And what I learned." She spoke musingly, as if recalling it all. "You must understand—you do understand, I know—the Adept travels along a path that carries him through many

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more years than I have taken to reach—what? I myself do not yet know."

"The beginnings," Gees suggested, after waiting for the end of it.

She said, "Picture yourself a baby, groping your way into this world—this three-dimensional world—into which you must fit. At first your consciousness of material things is very vague—perhaps because you are so busy forgetting the immaterial things you have left to come to this state. For two—three—four years you are incapable of understanding what people say, what will hurt you, what is good for you—you are learning, very slowly, and in the learning you may hurt yourself. That is of three dimensions. The fourth is more difficult."

"Takes longer," he said—to induce her to go on.

"Takes longer," she echoed. She made an odd movement of her head, and for an instant he saw the sun-glint in her eyes, whose colour he was never able to determine. Then she was not there. Apart from the turn of her head, he saw no movement, but knew himself alone in the room. Then she was there again, perched on the edge of the table as if she had not moved. "You see?" she went on, as if there had been no intermission. "There is no magic—there is only cause and effect."

He got his breath back with an effort. Sitting there, she looked utterly attractive, all woman—it was difficult to see her as witch, mistress of the old magic that is not magic, but a far greater thing. Yet—was she mistress of it, or subservient to it?

"Don't do that again," he said, trying to retain normality.

"It was the first thing I did—like the baby trying to walk," she told him. "I took one step, and came back. One step, in that fourth direction that you know but cannot realise, and then I came back. Quickly, gladly. I have never been so much afraid as when I saw what that one step revealed. There are presences—intelligences far beyond ours, there. And I was like the baby taking its first step in this world we know. It was a year and more before I took that one step again—I was afraid. I had my three-dimensional understanding, there in a four-dimensional world. I could not see, could not venture farther. I—tottered, and came back. Dared only to come back."

"I understand," he encouraged her. "And then?"

"If you were a child of five, you would be in this world what I am in that," she told him. "I have to learn. I think the Adepts had to learn, but they had put many years of study into a knowledge I have stolen from the axe-handle—they were prepared, able to see, perhaps, when they entered on that state. As if for years you trained a man to work a machine, taught him by pictures and drawings and lessons, and then took him to the machine. With my stolen knowledge, with no preparation, I face the machine, and have to learn how to use it."

"In other words, consciousness of the fourth dimension in space does not mean control of that dimension," he commented thoughtfully.

"You said you wanted me—I am giving you all of me," she said, and smiled. "Giving myself away—isn't that the phrase? I tried the one step, and found myself blind and helpless—that was the beginning. As I say, I took that one step, and it was a year and more before I had courage enough to take it again."

"And then?" he asked, watching the play of her expressions. She was forcing herself to a confession—why, he could not yet determine.

"I took—the step you have just seen me take. One movement into that other world, which cuts across this. I know, now—it cuts across this world in which we live, and one may move into it, move in it, and return. Not so much a fourth dimension, as I see it now, as a fourth direction. I move in it, and as far as you are concerned I am not—"

Her voice ceased, and again she was not there. Gees realized a little flurry of air, as if her effacement of herself had caused a vacuum that had to be filled, and as he realised it she was sitting again on the table edge, as if nothing had happened.

He said, "Don't do that!" with angry emphasis.

She laughed. "One step," she said. "Not a three-dimensional step—you see, I don't move a foot or a hand. I move along another line, one that has no relation to the lines you know. Out of your sight and consciousness, to return into it as I went."

Trying to retain sanity, he said, "You are a very dangerous person. You have got not only knowledge, but control of this other state of being. Which, as I see it, is not permitted to humanity—we have to live in the world we know. You will be destroyed, I think, as An and its Adepts were destroyed. You know too much."

"I will risk it," she retorted defiantly. "If I can first destroy Jerome Naylor, I will risk all that my knowledge brings on me. I live to that end—am devoted to that end."

"A petty, human perversion of a knowledge that might be of service to all mankind!" He condemned her with the pronouncement. "Knowing as you know, you ought to be bigger, saner. Not like this."

"I am what I am—Dark Lagny's child," she said incisively. "Set here, no matter what I

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might be elsewhere, to fulfill a purpose. After—I do not know, but the purpose must be fulfilled. I know! To you it is a futility, a very small and mean use of life, but who are you to say what is use and what is futility? You challenged me from the moment I first spoke with you. You towered over me, told me in effect that I faced one who knows from the beginning, while I steal in at a point far along the path, and try to steal knowledge for which I should have paid by years of patience. It is true—but I have the knowledge. I can move as you cannot—you have seen."

"Child, you are playing with a thunderbolt of the gods as if it were a toy!" he told her angrily. "You don't know what you do."

"Who are you to judge me?" she demanded with equal anger. "Give me another cigarette, and don't presume beyond your knowledge!"

The utter, practical anticlimax of the request—or command—brought a smile to his face. He proffered his case, and the lighter followed it. She leaned toward him to get a light, and again poised herself on the table edge, smiling a little. Dark Lagny's child—or Dark Lagny herself, reborn. So Gees thought, then.

"We are sane again," she remarked, with the cigarette alight.

"And that laugh, last night?" he asked after a pause.

"I laughed twice," she said frankly, and he nodded assent, but did not interrupt. "They were—you were there, you know. I stood on the edge—it is more than ever I have attempted before in darkness, though in daylight I put Peter in your car—heard you talk to Nettie."

"I don't like this," he said, frowning. "Are you intending to haunt me?"

"Jerome Naylor had called on you, so I took Peter in my arms, and stepped out—so—" Gees gasped, for she was no longer there, but the air appeared to swirl about the table edge. Her voice came to him as if from a great distance, not raised, but a stilly ghost of a voice. "I put him in the car and soothed him to quiet—he lay quiet where you would sit, I knew. And that was all. I stepped back, here."

"How?" he asked, after a pause for thought over the incredibility.

"Just . . . so." Again she sat there, real, as if she had not moved. "You see, once you know how to move along that line—the line that is so hard to see—you can regard the three dimensions we all know as a sheet of paper—it is a poor simile—but you can go under and above and round the dimensions we all know as if they did not exist. Or rather, as if they existed as an adjunct to the line on which I am learning to travel. When I know more, am more used to it, I shall be able to control my movements along it and go where I choose. Now, I step out, and am afraid. So I step back."

"Like a child learning to walk," he said thoughtfully.

"Just like that," she assented, with obvious pleasure in his comprehension of her state.

He said with sober gravity, "I am thinking of what you may control—when you have learned to control it fully. As I see it, you are on the way to full knowledge of one of the primal forces of the universe, and mankind is not yet sufficiently advanced to use such a knowledge as that. You have no right to it."

"I have!" she contradicted, incisively. "It was there for me to read—left to me by Dark Lagny on the bone shaft."

"You have no right to it," he repeated. "You are not Adept, even. If you persist in using this power, you will be destroyed."

"By whom?" she challenged the statement, defiantly.

"Not by any human agency." He spoke slowly, and as if thinking to make sure that every word was fitting. "It may seem to be by human denial of your right to use the power, but in reality it will not be so. There are powers beyond this fourth dimension of space, powers that watch humanity and say, 'Thus far, and no farther.' Which is why spiritualists often become obsessed and silly—they have no right to go beyond human limits. Lodge and Doyle are cases in point, great intellects that became moronic, condemned by the powers beyond this fourth dimension. So you too will be condemned if you persist. I warn you—stop tampering with this thing, for the human race is not far enough advanced to use it to wise ends. It is not so far advanced as in the days of Atlantis, and the whole continent was destroyed to prevent the survival of the knowledge you have."

She shook her head. "No," she said, "but because of other knowledge that I have from the axe-handle, and dare not use—dare not even define to you, near Adept as you are. This, I think, is given me to use—I shall use it, and with it destroy my enemy."

"Perverting a mighty force to petty ends," he said. "I tell you, if you do that, you will be destroyed. It is—well, sacrilege."

"I will take the risk," she told him angrily.

He stood up. "It's up to you—I've warned you," he said. "One other word, Miss Warenn. You're asking something for nothing, in this. I tell you—that can't be done. You've got to give to get, whether you seek vengeance, or profit, or love."

He went to the door—his hat was in the car, he knew, where Peter had knocked it by rubbing against him. Now Peter moved from his

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stance and sat in the doorway, looking up, as if praying this stranger to stay. Gees bent to tickle the cat's ears.

"No use, old chap," he said. "She's far too set on her course. Good-bye, Miss Warenn."

"But I wanted to tell you—ask you—" she began, and broke off.

"I said—good-bye, Miss Warenn," he repeated coldly, and went out to the car.

Since neither Irene nor Adolphus was in evidence, he drove away, along the tortuous lane, shadowed by the downs, that took him to the main road and Londonward.

THE flat, on the third floor of No. 37, Little Oakfield Street, which is an exceedingly decorous and respectable street not far from the Haymarket, consisted of four rooms—and usual domestic offices, of course. Gees reserved two rooms as his residence, maintained one as his own very comfortably furnished office, and the fourth, on the right of the short corridor as one entered the flat, was devoted to Miss Brandon's use.

She had been his secretary since, to his father's wrath, he had announced in the personal columns of otherwise unblemished newspapers that he was prepared to tackle anything from mumps to murder.

The day after his return from Troyarbour, she sat behind the typewriter on her desk, smoking one of Gees' cigarettes, while he sat on the corner of the desk. He had dictated all he could tell her about his visits to Naylor and interviews with Ira Warenn, and now her shorthand notebook lay closed beside her, until he should see fit to go to his own room and leave her to get on with the transcription.

He appeared in no hurry, but, for him unusually and gravely thoughtful. Miss Brandon sat silent, waiting. She was, as he had realised long since, an exceedingly attractive girl, and a clever one as well. Clever enough to hide from him the fact that he had so far grown into her life, become such a part of her thought and feeling, as to form her chief interest. Clever enough to retain a cool, rather satiric attitude, knowing full well that any change in their relationship would end her tenancy of this room: she wanted to keep near him: some day, perhaps, he might realise that he had only to ask . . .

To-day, she waited, and in the end stubbed out the cigarette in the ash-tray she had so placed that he could use it too. Instantly his case flew into his hand, and opened itself under her eyes.

She said, "No, thank you, Mr. Green. Not just now."

"Oomph! Did you get all I've been telling you?"

"I can promise you an accurate transcription," she answered coolly.

"And what have you!" He put acrid emphasis into the comment. "I meant—did you take it all in enough to discuss it?"

"I—yes, I think so, if you wish to discuss it with me. That fourth dimension part of it is rather over my head, I'm afraid. I know very little about the subject—except I know that if we could find a fourth perpendicular to the three we already comprehend, we should open up a new world, and have full control of this we know."

"That's all anyone knows," he said. "Except, perhaps, this Ira Warenn. She's found it, past doubt, but there's a vast difference between—I might find a herd of elephants, but that's not to say I could make money out of giving tuppenny rides on 'em. You get that."

She nodded, thoughtfully. "One has to learn, just as one learned to walk and talk. Yes. In a different world. New conditions—yes."

"New—presences," he added. "You've got it down—what was it she told me? Yes—intelligences far beyond ours. In the world that interpenetrates ours, the fourth perpendicular cutting across all three that we know. Obviously those intelligences must be far beyond ours, since they have full comprehension of this fourth direction—line of movement, or what you like to call it. Consider that at this moment you and I are being watched and studied, perhaps, by those far vaster intellects—and moving as they can they are able to see into our minds and spread out our very thoughts while we are restricted to speech for interpretation of what we want to express—"

"I'd rather not consider it," she interrupted.

"You prefer normality, eh? Well, I don't. I want to explore that fourth direction, learn to step out from solidity into that unknown region as she stepped out. Out and back, at will."

"Which means, you will go back to Troyarbour," she asserted.

"I shall not!" He put vigour into the denial. "A, I've paid in Naylor's cheque for eighteen guineas, told him I'll have nothing more to do with him, and so finished the case. B, I am definitely afraid of that woman—girl, for she's little more. I don't know what her age actually is, except that she's so strong an example of heredity that in development she's centuries old. I mean she has a vast inherited knowledge, a store that she hadn't to learn again at the beginning of this present life. As if Dark Lagny had come back to earth."

"I know," she said. "We all have—flashes, call them—of prenatal memory, at times. Some of us more than others."

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"You?" he asked interestedly.

"Sometimes. I may feel that I know a place, or a person, or seeing or meeting for the first time. Prenatal memory, I think."

"Probably. Almost certainly. Y'know, Miss Brandon, you make a most excellent wall for me to bounce my thoughts against. They come back all flattened out and expanded, so I can see 'em much better."

"You told me that some while ago," she observed. "My ulterior use to you, in addition to the mere secretaryship."

"Now you're getting uppish, and we're wandering clean away from all I want to discuss with you," he reproved her. "This – never mind St. Pol Naylor—I wonder why St. Pol, but it doesn't matter. He knows no more than I do about this fourth-dimensional discovery—"

"Fifth dimensional, surely," she interrupted.

"Fourth in space—I'm leaving time out of it, for simplification of my own thought. Browning had a glimpse of it—he was a seer, of course. Do you remember *Abt Vogler*?"

She shook her head. "Some of it. Not enough to quote."

He quoted—

"Nay, more: for there wanted not who walked in the glare and glow,
Presences plain in the place; or, fresh from the Protoplast,
Furnished for ages to come, when a kindlier wind should blow,
Lured now to begin and live, in a house to their liking at last;
Or else the wonderful Dead who have passed through the body and gone,
But were back once more to breathe in an old world worth their new:
What never had been, was now; what was, as it shall be anon;
And what is—shall I say, matched both?—"

She ended the verse, very softly, " 'For I was made perfect too.' "

"You do know it, I see." he said. "To have written that, he must have seen, no matter how dimly. Along that fourth direction, into the world of those greater presences. And she's found the way in!

"That axe-handle, which gave her the key, must be terrific. Not as an axe-handle, but as what I think it was originally."

"And, that?" she asked, as he did not explain.

"She said it was narwhal horn. In other words, it would last not merely years, but centuries, unless it were laid out to rot through weather conditions—heat and frost. Tens of centuries—it may date back to the days when An was still above the waters, may be some symbol carried when the processions went through Atlantis, the mother of hewn cities (Atlantis was literally carved out of the living rock). Priestly or royal—more likely belonging to some Adept.

"I want to discuss with you, for the sake of clarifying my own ideas, what she's got on that ancient bone. All in runic characters, I made it to be, and mighty hard to decipher because the later inscription is crossed over the first lot, which is scribed round and round the thing while the other runs up and down. A low trick, I call it. But she said, after we'd been talking about this use of the fourth dimension and she'd given me the demonstrations I described to you—she said there was other knowledge in the inscriptions."

"I've got that down," Miss Brandon said. "The report is—comprehensive."

He shook his head. "There was so much," he said. "The actual secret of life, the interrelationships between electricity and light and etheric vibration, transference of personality from one human being to another—how much wasn't there! And if she's got—"

"She told you she dared not use it," she reminded him.

"Not now," he said, "but what of her tomorrows? She may begin to experiment with that other knowledge as she's doing now with this of the fourth dimension. That woman may wreck the world, yet."

"Isn't that a slight exaggeration?" she asked quietly.

"I dunno, Miss Brandon. No—I do not know. How much she has there, and how much she dare do with it. She'd dare a lot."

"In other words, you will go back to see her," she asserted, smiling a little.

"Have I got to tell you again that I will not go back?" he retorted with angry emphasis, as he left for his own room.

* * *

That same night, Sam Thatcher and Ephraim Knapper came out from The Three Thorns together at closing time, to walk the hundred yards or so that would take them to Sam's front door, hard by the church. The weather had changed since Gees had driven out from the village and revelled in the still clarity of October at its best. Now, with the moon three days short of full, light masses of wrack went hurrying north-eastward across the sky, and even down in this sheltered hollow of the downs little eddies of the wind that beat across the heights brought a faint tang of the sea with them. Sam Thatcher cocked his eye skyward.

"We'll hev rine, sune," he announced gravely.

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"Aye," Ephraim concurred. "We c'n du wi' some wet."

"Aye," said Sam, "but it'll be tu laate. I lifted all my taters, an' they'm not right oop to sizeishness. An' my marrers—well!"

"Aye," said Ephraim, sympathetically.

Abruptly and involuntarily they staggered apart, as if a wedge of enormous dimensions had been suddenly thrust down between them. Sam emitted an "Ow!" that was nearly a screech, and Ephraim grunted as if whatever had struck him had got him in the wind. Then the two of them faced each other, warily, angrily, each with balance recovered.

"Whoy'd yu du thaat, Ephraim?" Sam demanded.

"It wur yu," Ephraim responded harshly. "It wuren't me."

"Yu hit me in the belly!" Sam said wrathfully. "F'r tu pins I'd pound yu, Ephraim Knapper, till yu howled."

"It wur yu, I tell yu," Ephraim insisted. "Yu hit me i' the belly so my beer nigh riz on me. Whoy'd yu do thaat, Sam?"

"Dooan't be a fule!" Sam urged. "Else, I'll pound yu, I saay!"

Then, both recovering breath, they became conscious of a faint scent that an eddy of the night wind drove at them. Such a scent as sometimes drifts to one's nostrils from a woman's hair—but the moonlight showed clear space all round them. There was a gap in the cloud wrack through which the pale light shone down, and from the back of the inn to Sam's doorway, and for the thirty yards or more of open ground to either side, was no human being but themselves.

Sam whispered, "Reckon I'll carry a Bible when I goo about o' nights. Wish I had a little 'un—mine's a big owd thing."

Ephraim parted his lips to utter, perhaps, some similar vow, but whatever he would have said was lost. For from somewhere between the two of them sounded the ghost of a laugh, deep-toned and musical—the tiny semblance, as it were, of a woman's laughter.

With bristling hair the pair of them stared at each other, and Ephraim's teeth chattered as he stared. Then with one impulse they faced toward their homes and ran—yes, scampered, those elderly men, like agile boys. One door slammed, another door slammed, and Ephraim faced his wife, an elder sister of Martha Kilmain, and fully as large and formidable as that more prosperous postmistress.

"What on yearth is wrong wi' you, Ephraim Knapper?" she demanded.

"She—she laughed ag'in," Ephraim half-sobbed. "Outside."

"Stuff!" said Mrs. Knapper, angrily and contemptuously. "An' yu neenter reckon to smesh our door, neether. What's wrong wi' you is beer, Ephraim Knapper—beer! I've no patience!"

Ephraim removed his boots in silence, and crept humbly to bed.

* * *

Two days later, Miss Brandon opened the morning's letters, ignoring the fact that three of them were marked "Personal." She had her orders from Gees on that point. He had told her that, if he indulged in any low intrigues of which the particulars were not fit for perusal by her virgin eye, he would let her know in advance, and had added that *Personal* on an envelope almost certainly meant that the inquiry itself was a dud. So she opened them all.

One she put aside from the rest, and, after perusing and sorting them, some for answer by herself, and some for Gees' attention, she returned to consideration of this separate missive, to which a pinkish, blue-stamped slip—a cheque—was pinned. She read the letter again:

Messrs. Gees,
37, Little Oakfield Street, S.W.1.
Dear Sirs,
We have been instructed by Mr. J. St. Pol Naylor that the enclosed cheque is not to be paid on presentation. We therefore return the cheque herewith.
Yours truly,
p.p Barkminister Bank, Ltd.
Manager.

Try as she would, Miss Brandon could make nothing of the signature: it was as illegible as, if not more illegible than, a doctor's prescription, and she gave it up to think over the letter.

She wanted to hold it back—she even went so far as to question whether she herself could pay the eighteen guineas into Gees' account, and so prevent him from knowing that Naylor had—to put it colloquially—bilked him. But it could not be done: she had just bought her new fur coat for the winter. No, he would have to see it, and then—she knew what would happen. Oh, yes! She knew, very well!

When, as was his habit, Gees came to lean in her doorway, give her "Good-morning," and suggest a matutinal cigarette—which she sometimes accepted—she held the letter with its enclosure out to him mutely, and he advanced to take it from her and read it. Then, dropping it from before his eyes, he gazed steadily at her till she felt herself blushing. She wanted to hide from that gaze—anything but meet it.

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"Now say, 'I told you so!' " he growled savagely.

"Well, I did say you'd go back there," she admitted, and reached for the telephone.

"Quite right. And quite right that you did, too. Eleven o'clock—no, tell 'em twelve-fifteen. I'd nearly forgotten that I promised to look in on my father this morning. Twelve-fifteen, Miss Brandon."

"Very good, Mr. Green."

With the letter in his hand, and with no question about the rest of his mail, he stamped off to his own room. Miss Brandon spoke into the telephone receiver.

"Tunnicliffe's? Yes, Mr. Green's secretary speaking. Mr. Green wants his Rolls-Bentley sent to Little Oakfield Street by twelve-fifteen, please. Yes. You'd better put the hood and side-curtains up, as it's such a wet morning. Thank you very much—good-bye."

As she replaced the receiver she reflected that she ought, really, to have told them to fill the petrol tank. But they would probably do it without being told—they serviced Gees well, knowing that his account was always paid promptly and that there would be a good chance of losing his profitable patronage if they failed him.

"It will be really wet on the downs," Miss Brandon told herself, observing how little rivulets ran down the panes of her window. "I don't want it to bother him, but I hope it drowns her!"

CHAPTER IV

"I DIDN'T CALL"

MUDDY rivulets made shining, yellowish ribbons of the ruts in the land: rain fell with heavy, inexorable steadiness. The wind had died away, even out on the open road, and here, after turning off for Troyarbour in late afternoon, Gees drove in a stillness troubled only by the steady *surr-rr-r* of the downpour and the noises that his car made along the way.

A turn of the ascent revealed, ahead of him, a heavy tumbril, drawn by a single horse. Inside the tumbril stood a boy holding the reins, and in some part protected from the rain by a sack drawn hoodwise over his head and shoulders. Gees heard him say, "Whoa—whup!" in a Boanerges roar, and the horse leaned back into its breeching so that the vehicle stopped—with no room for passing.

He opened his door to yell, "All right, come on! I'll back," and, slamming the door again, put in reverse and began a gingerly retreat, trying to see through the fog behind him.

It was the second day of rain, and trickling rivulets from the ruts had overflowed on to the soft patch of ground that made the widening, and softened some part of it almost to bog consistency. Gees felt the car canting over as the near-side driving wheel sank in, and unwisely thrust in the accelerator pedal. Down went the wheel to axle depth, and the differential, spinning the sunken wheel while the off-side one, on firm ground, remained stationary, told him that the car was bogged. And the tumbril passed him, the hooded boy standing like a scarecrow inside it, with never a glance at the leaning car. Gees yelled, "Hi, you!" in vain.

A first glance showed that both front and back near-side wheels were down to their axles. The car was undamaged, but needed a breakdown crane to get it on to firm ground again. And he had to walk, splash through the mud of the evil-surfaced lane, to Troyarbour. It was his nearest refuge—unless he spent the night in the car with one rug. Unthinkable, that.

He reached in and switched on the off-side side light and the tail light: there was plenty of juice in the battery, and the small amount of current those two lamps would use would not affect the starter in the morning. He got his small suitcase out of the locker at the back of the car, put in all movables and relocked the compartment, remembered to take the ignition key out, and locked all four doors. Then he began to plod his way along the lane to Troyarbour, and the rain and the night came down on him as he squelched wet-footed on his journey, inventing fresh curses each time he sank a foot in a mud-hole.

Until, on his left, showed the lone farmhouse he knew, a blackish oblong against the grey indistinctness of rising ground that sheltered it. Light showed through a blind that had been drawn down or across the window of the room he knew, and, less clearly, came out from the narrow central hallway, indicating that the front door was standing open. He paused for a moment, and knew himself wet and chilled—and, on foot, it was a long way yet to Troyarbour inn. Not a long way in a car, nor, really, on foot in normal weather, but on such a night as this. . . . And that cowslip wine, as she had called it, was a cordial to make one forget the small irritations of life. Cowslip wine! If she had waved a cowslip over it, that was as near as the flower had got to the fluid.

The thought drew him a couple of steps toward the open door—

Resolutely he turned and went on his way. It would not do—he had come here to settle accounts, in the full sense of the word, with

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J. St. Pol Naylor, not to measure wits against this witch, or join in with her to wage the feud she maintained against Naylor. No! Not for a barrel of the stuff! Rest and food and drink at Todd's, then to get the car pulled out of the mud back there along the lane, and to beard Naylor and make him realise that he could not play the fool.

Moonrise, evidently—the greyness of young night was lightening, now. And the rain was lessening, too. Abruptly Gees walked into a white wall, a blanket of fog, warm and close-clinging. He took four more steps, five—and stumbled against a bank. The side of the lane, obviously, yet he had, as far as he knew, been keeping a straight line toward Troyarbour. He set off again, and found himself up against —was it the bank on the opposite side of the lane, or on the same side?

Conscious that he had lost his sense of direction, he stood a moment to reflect, and decided that, if he went very slowly, and kept quite close to the bank, he would eventually get either back to Wren's farm, as they called it, or to Troyarbour, according to the direction in which he was now facing—and whether he were facing toward or away from the village was more than he knew, after those two stumbles against the bank—or banks—bounding the narrow land. If his eyes had been completely bandaged he could not have been more surely deprived of sight than by this suddenly enveloping fog.

Step by slow step, taking care to keep to the slope of the bank, and not leave it for the comparative level of the middle lane, he went on—or back? He could not tell, until he stepped out from the blinding reek as suddenly as he had entered it, and saw again the dark oblong of the farmhouse, now ahead of him and to his right. Here was no fog, only the grey gloom of heavily clouded night with a full moon. He looked back, and saw only the same grey dimness, no sign of fog.

What was wrong with him?

He remembered the tale of Gunnar the Bald, who went a-viking in his long ship after he had incurred the wrath of Skal, an Iceland witch. Gunnar had laughed at Skal's threats of vengeance, and had sailed out on what looked like a prosperous voyage, until, on a night of full moon, blinding, clinging fog had dropped over the ship as he held to the steering oar, and in it he had piled the vessel on the rocks of Orkney and found his doom—the doom the witch Skal had promised him. Men of Orkney had waited on the beach to repel the ravager, and, so the legend went, they had seen no fog!

Yet, Ira Warenn had agreed, there is no magic!

In some way she had learned that he was returning to Troyarbour, and wanted to assure herself, perhaps, that he did not intend to side with Naylor against her. Perhaps that was it. If not, what did she want of him? By the look of things, if she who was garnering secrets of old time had mastered that of blinding one by a semblance of fog, she wanted to stop him from passing her house, wanted him to come to her, not go on to the inn. He said aloud, "Very well—we'll see!" and devoutly prayed that he would see, all the way to the inn. He was not going any nearer that house of hers. No, not if he had to wander in the wet darkness until dawn, or go back to the car and sleep in it. Magic or no magic, he was not to be beaten by her.

On and on he tramped, till he knew himself far past the point at which he had stepped into the blinding white wall and lost himself, and the night lightened, for the moon was now climbing up the sky and raying on to the layers of cloud. No fog—not even the slightest of mists. He said aloud, "Beaten you!" and laughed.

Was it an echo? Was his laugh deep-toned and musical, a sound to bring one to a pause, with a little thrill that was half pleasure in the lure of the sound, half apprehension lest one's most secret thought was being interpreted? He barked out a single derisive, "Ha!" and plodded on, and from some fold of ground the "Ha!" came back to him—yes, that was echo, and nothing else.

Which proved that the other had been something else—someone else.

Now he saw the lights of the inn, and breathed easily. Now he had the door open, had entered the bar-room, and Todd gaped at him. Disregarding the five worthies—Fred Carphin had evidently been forgiven, for he was back there with the others—Gees dropped his suitcase on the brick floor with a thud, and faced Todd.

"Whisky," he said. "A half-tumbler of whisky—and gimme a syphon if you have one. I'll make the mixture myself. Gimme the bottle—I want something more than a mere double. And the same room?"

"Cert'nly, sir," Todd answered, and put down bottle and glass. "You—you mean to make a treble, sir, I take it."

"I'm taking it," Gees told him. "Very nearly neat, too. Draw those chaps a pint apiece, Todd," he said, "and have what you like yourself—take it all and the whisky out of this. You haven't got a bath-room, I know, but could you build me a good fire to sit over awhile?"

"Come through this way, sir," Todd invited, and lifted the bar flap.

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There was a good coal fire in the "sitting room," and an armchair which had only two broken springs when Gees tried it. He seated himself and huddled over the fire, shivering visibly.

* * *

"Well, sir—" Todd answered the question hesitantly the next morning, as Gees looked up at him from behind a mighty plateful of bacon, eggs, and mushrooms, "she was one o' them what answered my advert f'r a cook-housekeeper, an' the only one what'd come to a lonely place like this. Father dead, an' there's a stepfather. Useter knock her about, an' she stood that. But then worse, if you understand."

"Easily," Gees agreed. "By the way, I had a hot water bottle last night."

"That was hers, sir. She reckoned you oughter have it."

"That's why I mentioned it—I thought as much. Y'know, Todd, there are some things you can't buy in the best and biggest hotels—things that count for a lot more than those you do buy."

"I'd never call this a hotel, sir," Todd protested.

Gees said musingly, "Tell me, what staff is kept up at the Hall?"

"Staff?" Momentarily Todd looked puzzled at the abrupt question. "Well, sir, there's five maids, countin' in the cook, an' Phil Hodden an' a boy f'r the gardens, an' Hanson—he's groom an' looks arter the car. Which Mr. Naylor don't use the car much—don't go out a lot, except ridin' wi' that big hound o' his tailin' along behind."

"And what sort of hound is that?" Gees inquired.

"I dunno what sort exactly, sir. If you crossed a bloodhound wi' one o' them big wolf-dogs—them Russian animals, I mean, you'd get somethin' like it, I reckon. Nervous, shy sorter brute it is."

"Greyhound and borzoi, you mean," Gees suggested.

"That's it, sir—bor—bortzoy. Like you said. But heavier—it got a very broad chest an' big quarters—a big hound. Savidge, accordin' to Phil Hodden, but it stick close to Mr. Naylor when he's out ridin', an' don't take no notice o' anyone else."

"Oomph! Is there a telephone at the post-office?"

"No, sir—not for people to use. I believe Martha sends the telegrams by telephone, but customers can't talk on it."

"Okay, Todd. I shall probably be staying again tonight."

"Thank ye, sir." And Todd, realising the statement as dismissal, went out, after which Gees finished his breakfast and in turn went out, over to the general store and post-office, where he phoned for a break-down lorry to get the Rolls-Bentley out of the mud. Then he slung his waterproof over his arm and set out.

The two men in charge of the breakdown lorry were made happy. Gees had seen to that, after ascertaining that the Rolls-Bentley was undamaged.

Now, with the breakdown lorry setting off toward home, Gees pressed his starter button and headed the other way, toward Troyarbour, and at about two-thirty in the afternoon, passed through the gateway of the Hall—the beautiful Italian gates stood open, this time—to pull up, as before, opposite the entrance. And, as before, Nettie Carphin answered his ring at the bell.

"To see Mr. Naylor, please," he asked. "The name is Green."

"I'll see, sir," she said. And, without inviting him to enter, turned and left him. She also left the door open, but he did not enter. From the step he eyed the trophies on the walls, and presently Nettie returned and faced him, primly, even woodenly.

"Mr. Naylor is not at home, sir," she said mincingly.

"Uh-huh!" Gees sounded not at all perturbed. "You gave him my name?" He made the question one of slight anxiety.

"Yes, sir—I mean"— he had spoilt her composure, and she went scarlet under the steady gaze of his eyes—"he is not at home."

"Well, will you take a message for him?" he asked.

"Ye-yes, sir. I could do that," she assented.

"Well, just go and tell him I didn't call. Just that—nothing more. Mr. Green didn't call. Will you tell him that?"

"Yes, sir." She appeared to find nothing strange about the message.

"Thank you. That's all."

He turned and went, to find no Peter in his car, this time. He got in and drove away, and, as he went, realised that no Peter was necessary, to-day. He would go to Ira Warenn, make common cause with her against the bilking squire, as he now called Naylor in his own thoughts, and not leave Troyarbour until he had made the man sorry for himself. Not the amount, but the way in which he had been robbed of it, took Gees to the limit of anger.

So deciding, Gees pulled to the right when he got to the village, and ran the car into the open shed, placing it next Todd's wagon, as on the night of his arrival. Inquiry in the bar produced cold ham, not a factory product, but

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really home-cured—a rare thing in these days—with pickled onions, home-baked bread, Dorset butter and Cheshire cheese so ripe that only a connoisseur would risk it. A truly Olympian lunch, in fact, and with that as lining Gees brooded over a cigarette and a final half-pint of bitter, and then set out for Wren's farm.

He had no plan of campaign in mind, but was prepared to be guided by circumstances—and, possibly, by Ira Warenn. When knocking at the front door of the house produced no result—three knocks, crescendoed from forte to fortissimo—he went round to the back, and found the girl he wanted to see, in a badly soiled blue overall, feeding maize to a gawky brood of last spring's chickens, with Adolphus squatting on his hunkers beside her and watching the proceedings with faint interest. The boar stood up and wouffed as Gees rounded the corner of the house.

"Sit down, Dolph!" his mistress bade severely; and he obeyed. She said, "I'm sorry I couldn't come to the door, Mr. Green. Adolphus would have snatched one or two of these fowls, if I'd left him with them, and having begun to feed them, I must finish."

"Of course," he assented. "The genus sus is omnivorous, I know. I've seen three small chickens go down a pig's throat before he could be driven off the brood. They got into his stye."

"And Adolphus is no exception," she observed calmly, shaking the last of the maize out from the wooden bowl among the fowls. "I was going to get out of this dirty rag and take him for his afternoon exercise, now. Was it anything important you wanted to see me about?"

"Supposing I join you on the walk, and talk it over?" he suggested.

"If you wish. Just one moment, please."

Unfastening the belt and three buttons of overall, she stripped it off, and took it and the bowl to place them on a bench beside the back door of the house. Then she faced him again, dressed exactly as he had first seen her, except for flat, low-heeled shoes that, to his thought, marred the effect—they were not dainty enough. She said, "That's all. I am quite ready. So is Adolphus. Where would you like to go? I generally make a two-mile tramp of it."

"I'll leave direction and distance entirely to you," he answered. "All this country is new ground to me—the very existence of so remote a place as Troyarbour is still incredible to me. Its isolation."

"It was not always so," she told him. "Main roads, as you know them, are comparatively new things, and in old time this lane was a respectable road by comparison. It has not kept abreast of the times, not been 'taken over' as the phrase goes, and widened and made up, but is still the private property of Troyarbour Hall for nearly all its length. And the squires of Troyarbour do not want the place to grow."

"It won't, while that lane remains what it is," he declared rather grimly. "But aren't you going to get a hat?"

"Why should I? It isn't raining—and if it were I wouldn't care. I'll take you up to the crest that gives the place its name, and you shall see all of Troyarbour. Have you time, though?"

"As much as you care to spare," he answered.

"This way, then. Come along, Dolph! And don't eye those chickens like that!" She spoke the last sentence with severity, and the boar, understanding perfectly, fell in behind the pair of them as she turned toward the slope which went up from behind the farm buildings.

"You can estimate what the place was by the size of the church," she remarked as they walked slowly, bent-kneed, up the steep slope. "I believe the same thing applies to Norfolk and other agricultural districts where the population shrank after the Black Death. This church seats five hundred—used to seat them—and now the whole population of Troyarbour is not more than a hundred and fifty souls. That is, if they all have souls. One has doubts, in some cases."

IT WAS difficult to reconcile this easily speaking, self-possessed woman with the bizarre girl who had poured what she called cowslip wine for the two of them. Equally difficult to realise that one so plainly of the world beyond this village was a tenant farmer's daughter, and now a tenant farmer herself. So, silent for the while, Gees reflected, and she turned her head to smile at him, with evident amusement.

"It is the same person," she said. "Sometimes, you know, I wish it were not. Wish I were not—fated and fey, as I am."

"We make our own fates, Miss Warenn," he said gravely.

"A brave saying, but not quite true," she retorted, rather wistfully. "'We are ever and always slaves of these, the suns that scorch and the winds that freeze.' Not literally, but—let's talk of other things, if talk we must. Why did you want to see me?"

"I came back here to see Naylor," he answered, "to collect a debt that he refused to pay—refused insultingly. Now he has refused to see me, sent a message that he was not at

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home. I sent back a message that I didn't call. In other words, declared war."

"And what have I to do with that?" she asked thoughtfully.

"When I was here before, he wanted me to steal or in some way get possession of your axe-handle for him," he said. "Had an idea, because I once succeeded in doing a service of sorts to a man he knows, that I would undertake anything—even theft."

"Well, mumps to murder—you are the 'Gees' who put that advertisement in the papers, aren't you? And that might include theft."

"It said I was prepared to tackle anything from mumps to murder, not commit either of them," he pointed out. "Let me give you a hand."

They had reached the summit of the ridge under which both Troyarbour village and the farm sheltered. Before them rose a steep-sided mound running parallel with the crest, an obviously man-made earthwork of some sort, thirty yards and more in length. Gees took the girl's arm, and set his feet sideways for grip on the grassy steepness. They came to the narrow top of the mound, and Adolphus went to the end farthest from the village. Ira Warenn, still held, looked up at Gees.

"I know why you don't let go," she said.

"Because—in case you're wrong—there's the Hall in full view, and if Naylor sees us together like this, he'll begin to squirm," Gees told her. "This apparent intimacy will emphasise it."

She leaned toward him and laughed. "I know," she said. "And this ridge"—she pointed along the top of the mound—"is where the three trees used to stand. Thorn trees, three in line. When we Warenns had in our hands the high and middle and low justice, they had their use."

"Such as?" he asked.

"That end"—she pointed ahead of her—"was for men and where Adolphus sits was for women. The condemned. The tree at the end was drawn in toward the one in the middle by ropes. The convicted criminal was stripped, and stretched between the two trees by wrists and ankles. Then the ropes that had drawn the trees together were taken away, and the living body hung there like a cord. There was a man who took three days to his dying, stretched between the trees."

"What had he done?" Gees asked. "Stolen a rabbit?"

"I will not tell you what he had done," she answered. "It is on one of the parchment rolls in the chest, with a quaint old drawing of his punishment. If he had lived six days, the punishment would not have been too great. Think, now! In these days the great majority of people obey the laws, and live normal lives. In those days there had to be terror for those who broke the laws as that man did. It was in Stephen's time. My people held to Queen Maud."

"How do you know so much?" he asked abruptly.

"I know very little," she answered, after a brief pause. "My father taught me most of it—he was a very wise man. And he sent me to Tours for a year—the year my mother died. And there are books, English and French. When my work is finished I shall go out from this place, live differently. Practise all I have learned in theory."

"Your work?" he asked.

She leaned still closer to him, and pointed toward the Hall. "It is there," she said. "You know. Like you, I want him to see us in apparent intimacy, to fear me still more. Part of my work."

"Of your hate, say," he suggested, and smiled—with her head almost under his as she stood, she could not see the smile. "And there's Troyarbour down under us, quite probably seeing us and drawing its own conclusions. If you go ghosting to-night as you did when I was here before, you may hear mighty judgments on yourself—on us."

She laughed softly—just such a laugh as he had heard in the bar-room of The Three Thorns. Then, standing away from him, she pushed the night-dark hair back from her temple, and he saw a patch of discolouration—a bruise, evidently, on the whiteness of the skin.

"You see?" she asked. "It is not painful now, but it was at first. A proof of how little control I have. I stepped out, along that fourth line, just as I did the night you were here. And thought to step back into my own room—the one you have seen—but in actual fact came back between Ephraim and another man. Pushed them apart from each other as they were walking home, and so got this bruise. And"—again she laughed, softly and long—"each of them thought the other had done it. They were going to fight—it was so funny that I couldn't help laughing aloud, and that frightened them so much they simply fled to their homes. It was night, you see. And in that fourth direction there is no night, no darkness, because one does not see with the physical eye."

"One does not see—" He repeated it incredulously.

"I told you why you still wanted to hold my arm, up here," she explained. "I knew, last night, you were determined not to come near me, and blinded you as if you were in a fog, and turned you back—and then let you go. It is all quite simple—one sees in a different

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way. I could only explain it fully if you were able to comprehend that fourth direction of movement—but then I should not have to explain. You would know as I know. I might show you, teach you—"

"Control of this fourth dimension?" he asked.

She shook her head. "I have not yet got control of it," she answered. "Give you comprehension of it, say, such as I have myself. I think, with your greater knowledge, you could get control, and perhaps in turn teach me. Because—I have no right to what I know of it."

"No," he said, very soberly. "You are rather like a child sitting on a ton or so of high explosives, playing with the switch that might blow you to fragments at any moment. Something like that."

"I'm cold!" The way in which she shivered proved it. "Ephraim will be going home soon, too, and I want to see him before he goes. And Adolphus has had his exercise, and I've shown you all Troyarbour."

HE LOOKED down, and saw the village in its two separate yet connected hollows under the downs, with the Hall in yet a third hollow, and the lane that wound toward the Italian gates—closed again now, those gates. And the lone farmhouse with its outbuildings, quite apart from the life of the village, as she was apart from it all. A witch, perhaps, but in this climb no more than a girl like other girls—except for her hair and eyes, which were unlike any other that he knew or had seen. The mentality of her, for this hour, was so normal as to make him doubt the qualities he knew existed in her, or the power over which, as yet, she had only partial control. He took her arm again.

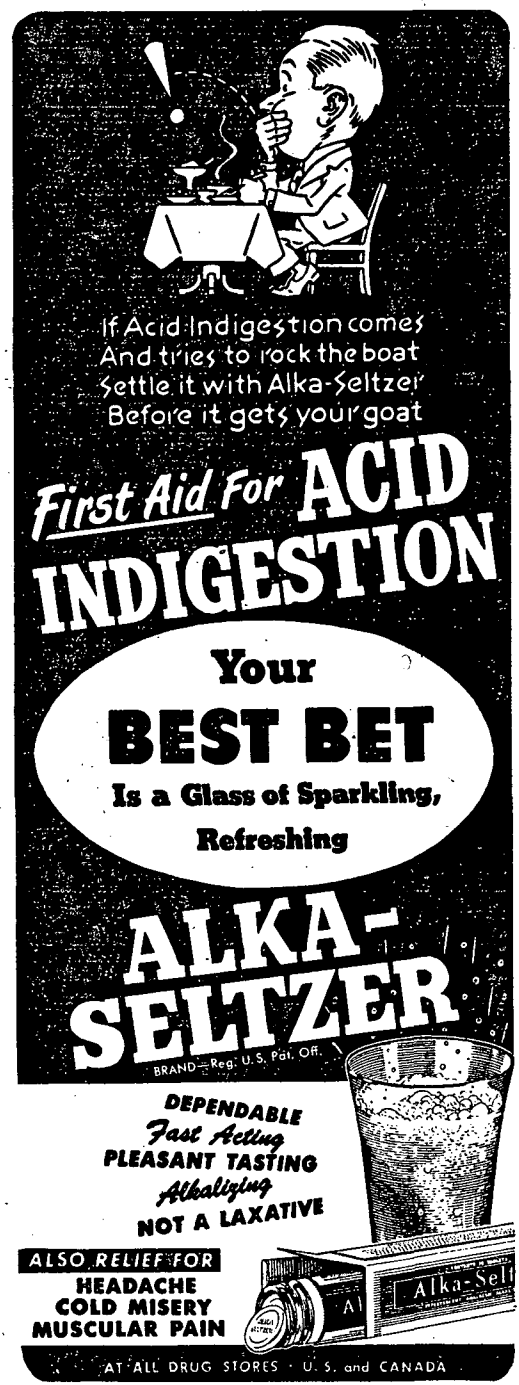
"'The suns that scorch us, the winds that freeze'," he quoted after her. "Yes, you're very little more than human, in reality. You've found something that might change the world, and you not only can't use it, but would put it to a small and personal use if you could."

"To what use would you put it?" she asked, rather sharply.

"I wouldn't use it to destroy one man," he answered bluntly. "I wouldn't use it to scare simple minds like those I find in the bar-room of the village pub. I might try to put it to real use."

"What is real use?" she demanded, with a bitted tinge to the question. "Could you make men other than what they are—could you change the cruelty and selfishness that rules the world? I seek to destroy one man—I admit it, because it is my purpose in life, something greater and stronger than myself.

"If you gained full control of this I know—this power of movement that sets one free in a way you cannot comprehend—and taught it to others, what do you think would be the result? Some country—this country, perhaps—would use it to master other countries, make itself



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the most powerful in the world and in the making inflict ten times the suffering caused by all the wars of the last five hundred years.

"I know a little, and with that I think! Mankind is not yet fit to hold this knowledge, but must suffer more, learn more of self-control. I think I told you—along that line, beyond the three in which we two have moved to reach this point over Troyarbour, there are greater intelligences, greater powers. I have communed with them like one talking to gods through a veil."

"And?" he asked, impressed by her intensity.

"They see man as a pitiful thing," she answered. "As I see Adolphus, there, waiting to swallow my chickens if for a minute I release my control over him. A being that insists on putting appetite before ultimate good. Oh, there are exceptions, I know, but can you point out to me one nation that will not try to beat down its neighbour for its own advantage, or one corporate body that will not crush and destroy any smaller competitor to swell its own profits?"

"No," he said, after a pause for reflection. "I'm afraid I can't. But you, with your small aim, are hardly the one to accuse others."

"I do not accuse—I state," she retorted. "As for my own aim, it is not in my control. I have to follow it, accomplish it. That, I know, you cannot understand. And I'm cold—let us go down."

"At least," he said, as he took her arm again and with her began the descent from the mound, "you're human."

"That—which also you won't understand—is the worst of it," she said. "The Norns—or Erda herself, perhaps—bound us all with that chain, or else Dark Lagny herself might have accomplished all that is left for me to do."

Near the comparative level of the ridge, she slipped, almost fell, and reached up—for a second or less he felt her arms round his neck. Then, as he would have held her, she was not there, but he was alone. Adolphus the boar, following them down, vented a savage grunt and came charging at Gees as he gained level ground. Fury blazed in the little, sunken eyes of the boar's head, and his protruding tusks seemed to stand out as Gees stiffened to meet the raging attack, knowing that, weaponless, he had little chance against the beast.

It was within a couple of yards of him when he heard Ira Warenn's voice, saw her materialise between him and the boar. Yet it was not mere materialisation. As suddenly as she had ceased to be in his hold, she was there, solid and real, no ghost that became visible, but a woman who stepped from somewhere and stood between him and the charging brute. The boar recoiled so suddenly as to fall in trying to turn, and slid ignominiously along the grass, with a squeal that told how it had not yet overcome hereditary porkishness, nor got back in full the courage of its wild, far-back ancestors. The girl pointed an accusing finger at it.

"Bacon!" she said, with vibrant anger, and Gees wanted to laugh. Adolphus lay on his side, and put his forepaws over his face.

"He knows what I mean." She turned to Gees. "It's my lowest term for him, the one I use when he has done wrong. As great a punishment as using a whip on him. I—I had to take that step to save myself from falling, or else—I didn't think he would blame my disappearance on you. He couldn't understand it, of course, and his piggy brain had the impression that you had destroyed me, so he tried to destroy you."

"I see." Gees got back the composure he had almost lost in the fearful moments of the boar's impending attack. "You didn't think I had strength and balance enough to hold you up."

"I knew, when I tried to save myself by holding to you, that you must not hold me up," she answered coolly. "Shall we go on down?"

"By all means," he almost snapped, and began the descent toward the farmhouse, leaving her to follow as she chose.

She said, "Follow on, Dolph—to heel!" and came level with him. So they went down and down, and came to the comparative level on which the house and buildings were set. There at the back of the house stood Ephraim Knapper, and as they came toward him, he scratched his head and replaced the old hat that his fingers moved in scratching. It was a gesture of bewilderment, almost—or so Gees saw it. Ira Warenn half-turned and, without speaking, gestured the boar with a pointing finger toward a pen, clean-strawed, of which half was roofed over—and under the roof the straw was thick enough for the animal to burrow and hide in it. He entered, as meekly as a newly whipped dog, and as she closed the door of the pen and shot the bar she uttered the one word —"Bacon!" at which the beast ran under the roof and hid in the straw.

She turned to Knapper. "Feed him, Ephraim," she bade.

"Aye, Miss Wren," he answered. "The sow's bedded, wi' her litter."

"Thank you. When you have fed Adolphus, you may go."

"Thank ye, miss. I'll 'tend to him."

She went, then, round to the front of the house, and Gees went with her. By the front door she paused, thoughtful.

"Do you notice that these men never drop

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their aspirates?" she asked. "Their dialect does not include that perversion of speech."

"I don't think theirs is a perversion," he said. "But I was questioning in my mind—it's nothing, though."

"Just nothing!" A trace of mockery marred the music of her voice. "But I'll tell you. We Warenns have held this farm since our castle was destroyed—you were thinking of how my father owed rent when he died, and so Jerome Naylor came to threaten me. It was not that we could not pay, but that my father would not pay, till the roof had been put back on the barn. You see there is a roof on it now—my father demanded what was due from his landlord before he would pay what was due from him. And—what I need, I have. You understand?"

"That it isn't safe even to think, with you," he answered.

She smiled, the smile that was more in her eyes than on her lips, and again he recalled Naylor's definition of her as "allure unutterable." She said, "Most of your thoughts are deep red or even violet-purple, and still quite transparent. Only the black and grey are beyond reading. But all this is new to me—I am still learning."

"Learning what?" he asked, with the harshness of incredulity.

"If I told you, you wouldn't understand—yet," she answered.

"Yet?" Echoing the word, he looked full into her eyes, and knew he would never be able to determine their colour. In that, though not in the shade of colour, they were like a phosphorescent wave he had once seen in the Mediterranean—once and never again. A hue that does not belong on earth, an indescribable beauty of light. So, but of darkness rather than of light, was the depth of her eyes, a dark radiance to which he could put no name.

"I believe you will," she said. "If— Listen!"

He heard it—the musical, yet terrible, clanging resonance that she had said came from the sword in the chest, the singing sword. He asked, when it died down, "What does it mean?"

She shook her head. "I have not asked," she answered. "I have not been told. I—the wine—will you come in with me? I need warmth—the wine. Will you—drink it with me?"

"Why?" he asked prosaically.

"Because I am afraid—the sword's song. Will you?"

He nodded assent, and she led the way toward the door. Following her, he entered the house. The song of the sword had ceased. Daylight was just beginning to fail, and the comfortless furnishings of the room he knew were losing some of their dinginess as dusk softened their outlines. The girl said, "Wait," and left him standing by the carven-lidded chest, seeing its age-gleaned sheen as almost luminous in the first beginning of night's gloom.

CHAPTER V

ENCHANTMENT

SHE RETURNED, and, facing her, Gees saw that she had brought the squat bottle, and the two glasses that—according to her—a Varangian had taken home with him from Byzantium. He asked, "What do you want with me?" and even to himself the words sounded querulous.

She asked in turn, "What do you want with me?" and he heard laughter in the question. It angered him, unreasonably.

"Nothing!" He almost shouted it. "You and your pigs!"

"And Peter—don't forget Peter." She sounded not in the least perturbed by his wrath. "Peter?" She made a call of it. "Oh, Peter!"

A flurry of movement, a black shape that leaped to her shoulders, and sat regarding Gees with baleful, greenish eyes, more fully alight than the gloom of the room warranted. He said, "I knew it all the time—you are a witch. And that isn't a cat at all—it'll turn into a bandersnatch any minute. Or a tove—a slithy one."

"It's the wrong season—they're summer creatures," she said calmly, and tickled Peter's ear as he sat back of her shoulders and purred, like a sawmill cutting hardwood. She took up the bottle and withdrew its cork, to poise it over one of the two flimsy glasses.

"That's for yourself, because you're cold," he said. "I know—that stuff is a fire that trickles down to your toes. But I'm not cold—don't fill the other glass. Is it cowslip wine again?"

"No," she answered, deliberately. "This is the liquor Freya poured for Odin, the potion that made him give up the Ring which hid her from the giants, so that they took the gold instead of her as their price for building Valhalla. It is the charm with which Dark Lagny bought her lovers. Do you want to know more about it?"

"I do," he said with dry irony. "Are you trying to buy a lover?"

She filled the second glass, and held it out to him. "Drink, and tell me," she retorted with equal irony. "Am I so cheap?"

On that, he took the glass. "I'm sorry," he said contritely. "I had an idea—never mind. To—to the best of you."

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"What you think is the worst may not be," she told him. "I am what I am, and—but to you, Mr. Green—Gees, I believe you call yourself, though why that should be I don't know."

"It's all my names," he explained. "Gregory George Gordon Green— Heaven help us all! Inevitable, when you come to think of it. Gees to you from henceforth—and here's to you—Ira."

He drank, and noted that she too drank. The liquid was a fire, a comforting luminance within him. He felt almost somnolent under its instant influence, and nodded his pleasure at her, smiling the while.

"That's good," he said. "You're a real pal. Sounds rather incongruous with what you really are, and know—but I mean it. Just that. I'm warmed from crest to toenails—feel quite cheerful, all at once. You are a witch! You know exactly what suits your victims."

"Quite so." As he put the empty glass down on the table, she took up the squat bottle and refilled it. "If I were a normal person, I should have offered you tea," she said. "Would you like tea?"

"In face of this far, far better thing that I drink—no," he answered, and took up the glass. "I prefer—enchantment."

"Is it?" She refilled her own glass. "Simple warmth, I thought—and I was cold, up there on the ridge of the three trees. How can there be enchantment in a mere drink?"

He heard derision in the question, and looked through the glass at the window. The fluid was not still, but a current circled in it from its surface to the bottom of the glass, a turning wave as if water sought to mix with oil. He asked, "Can you quiet that movement? I believe you did quiet it, in the stuff you called cowslip wine."

"This is that stuff, as you call it," she said. "Yes—look again!"

He had lowered the glass to speak to her. He held it up again, and the wine in it was still. He said, "You are a witch, obviously, and though this is out of the same bottle, it is a witch's potion, as dangerous as any of them. As you are—I've known it all along."

She laughed. It was the laugh he knew, the laugh he had heard when the worthies in Todd's inn had doubted whether it had actually sounded to them. For a moment he saw her as mistress of old wisdom—whether she had gained it fairly or by stealth was nothing to him, for he wanted it for himself. And he would be a very Ulysses, using her attraction to him to win her knowledge. So he told himself.

She said, very quietly, "Yes, I am a witch."

"Then I'm a wizard." He took up the glass she had filled for the second time. "And this—Byzantium, you told me. Their secrets went to Venice, and we get Venetian glass. But this is finer, more delicate. You know—forgive me for saying it—I don't like this room of yours. When we were coming back from looking at Troyarbour—the Hall included—you said to me, 'What I want, I have.' That means—this?"

With a gesture he condemned the shabbiness and discomfort of the room. And, as she looked almost angrily at him, added, "It's not good enough for you. Jewels should be set—don't you understand? If, as you said, you can have what you want, why are you in such a setting as this? It doesn't fit you. Do you see?"

She said, "Will you bring that glass with you?" and, taking up the glass she had filled a second time for herself, moved toward and through the doorway. Peter the cat sat still, as if knowing that he had no part in this adventure. Gees, taking up his glass, and noting that the ugly little bottle remained on the table, followed her across the narrow hallway, into the other main room of the ground floor.

"What I want, I have," she said, turning to him as he entered, and reaching past him to push at the door. It swung closed, and he heard the latch click.

Enough light came from the window to show him the room.

Sea-green walls, and rugs of deep crimson on the floor, fleecy rugs into which one's feet seemed to sink. A wide divan at the far side of the room from the door. Two little ebony tables—or stools—before the divan, on one of which was placed a bowl of dull red lacquer. The cover over the divan was of deep crimson silk, and cushions thrown on it were the colour of the walls. There was an armchair that appeared to rival the one Gees kept in his office for clients, as far as depth and comfort went, but this was upholstered in deep crimson velvet cord, and held more green cushions.

The only picture in the room hung over the divan. It was a water-colour of some southern European or perhaps Eastern fishing harbour, and against the harbour wall were moored two small boats, each with its sail set as if about to put to sea. One sail was green, and the other deep crimson. And in the picture, as in the room, the two colours did not clash, but harmonized. The effect was one of luxury, yet not of sensuousness. It was a room in which to think rather than feel—so Gees saw it then.

"Yes," he said. "I see. And—that other room?"

"To give an impression," she answered coolly.

"I see that, too. But you don't want to give me that impression."

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HER EYES smiled. "You are the first man to enter this room since my father died," she said. "Will you put your glass down—here?"

Moving toward the divan, she put her own glass on the ebony stool beside the lacquer bowl, and Gees placed his there too. Then she turned and stood facing him. She seemed suddenly hesitant, even nervous.

"I want to—to try an experiment with you," she said. "It was for that I tried to make you come to me last night—"

"What was it—that fog?" he interrupted "Not real fog."

"No. It was in your eyes only. Some time, I'll tell you how it is done. Now, as I said, I want to try an experiment with you."

"And if I say I won't let you?" Momentarily his distrust—even fear—of her came back. She was a witch. She had blinded him in an attempt at compelling him to come to her—for what?

"I want to find out if it is possible to take you with me—to take anyone with me—into the other world I am beginning to learn," she explained. "You see, when I enter it, all I am wearing goes with me. Do you remember Wells' story of the invisible man?"

"And how he caught cold because he couldn't make his clothes invisible." He nodded understanding. "But you can—you do, I know. Disappear clothes and all, I mean. It's one of those matter-of-fact details that wouldn't occur to one's mind, but an important one all the same. But how do you propose to include me in this?"

"This way." She moved so near as to stand touching against him. "Now put your arms around me as if—as if I were buying a lover. So!" She reached up, and he felt her arms go round his neck—and the scent of her night-black hair, lying against his lips, was like a breath out of Eden. She said, "So hold me—" and he felt her strain and press closely to him in a tense embrace that he knew was quite passionless. Even as he held her thus, he knew he was only subject of an experiment.

For a moment—or an age—she took him with her. The room disappeared. Without moving, he had been moved, and while he was still conscious of her clasp he knew fear, great and terrible. For she had drawn him into a world of such light as does not exist on earth, of sounds beyond the range of the normal human ear, of colours infra and ultra, such as the human eye cannot perceive. A world in which were vast Presences, comparable with nothing that he knew, and beyond all description. There was in that state neither time nor distance, but he was beyond and outside them, not in space, but in an infinity in which he could take hold on space and roll it up, hold it in his hands and look at any part of it—if only he could get past the tremendous fear that bound him to helplessness.

The Presences of which he was aware passed through and interwove with each other, yet were separate. He was one with Ira, clasped to her in inextricable embrace, yet a world away from her. And they two, one yet separate, were ants in a cathedral so vast that its confines did not exist for them—and why he had the sense of a cathedral he could not tell. He was before and behind and under and above Intelligences beside which the human mind is no more than a thousandth part of an atom, and They were passionless, Their consciousness of him was that of a vast reason considering the minutest bud on a twig.

For Them, he existed, as for a man a grain of sand exists—and no more than that. And They were Many, yet One—in this state was neither separateness nor unity, for there was no space, and no time, but infinity in which all things are one, all consciousnesses one, yet all are separate, for where space does not exist there are both unity and separateness, yet there is neither of those two. And he knew that, although space did not exist, yet it was there, as time was there, and both were no more than thoughts in the minds of these Presences, incomprehensible as these were to three-dimensional mentality, just as Athanasius found his Trinity incomprehensible.

In that timeless, spaceless state, Gees knew that until he entered it he had always considered the Athanasian creed an example of unconscious humour, but knew now that the saint had had a glimpse of this fourth perpendicular along which he, Gees, had been moved, and in the light of that glimpse had tried to define his belief, knowing it beyond definition as he tried.

In the light of that glimpse! Light unbelievable, colour incredible, a feast of glory in which desire failed, and adoration for the Maker of these things became too great for bearing. Sound that went past mere music, since it far exceeded the gamut of the human ear, and rolled in on his consciousness as the triple chord of the universe, comprehending all music and all discord, for music and discord were one, but discord was harmony in this infinity, since it was comprehensible as part of the vast plan of things. And this, he knew, was but a fourth dimension. What of the fifth, and sixth—and all that range which lies too far beyond space and time for even a fourth-dimensional Presence to comprehend it?

Gees knew, in the infinitesimal part of a second that was yet an age, since it was out of

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time, that there are gods and gods, and yet greater gods, all subservient to and subjects of the ultimate, the Power beyond sight and comprehension even of the Presences that interwove yet were separate in this state that he saw with other than his human eyes. Beyond time and space, beyond even infinity itself, is God, Who rules and creates all gods that are within fourth-dimensional comprehension, and beyond man's understanding.

Gees stood alone in the green and crimson room, straining nothing against his breast, holding nothing, but still conscious of the scent of Ira's hair against his lips. She was not there. His tensed arms relaxed, fell to his sides, and he said, "Damn!"

She laughed, such a laugh as he had heard in the bar-room of The Three Thorns, and he saw her—he would not have said that he saw her appear or materialise, but that he simply saw her—standing by the foot end of the divan. She shook her head, and said, "No."

"And what does that mean?" he asked, raspily.

"That I can take my clothes, but I cannot take you or anyone else with me," she answered. "I tried. Oh, I tried! I wanted you to see and understand. Because I know you could understand, if you saw."

"I did see," he told her. "So much—it would be impossible to tell you all. If I hadn't been so terribly afraid, I might have seen more. Talked to Them, perhaps. Yet They were too big to talk."

"Afraid—yes." She stared at him. "Then you did—I did take you! Oh, I'm so glad! So very glad of it! Just—it wasn't a moment before I lost you, couldn't feel myself holding you, but—"

"No," he said soberly in the pause. "It was not a moment. Where there is no time, there can be no moments."

"And you saw—you heard?" She went on staring, tensely.

"Yes. This was what I meant when, as you said, I wanted you: I did—wanted this you have given. I was one with you, and yet you were not there with me. Do you know? And I was terribly afraid."

"You have me, now," she said. "Completely. If I took you so far, up to the fear. That is the first of it—I can go past it, now, and take hold on the ends of a distance, fold it up and move across it without moving as I must, say, to come to you here—" She took a step toward him as she spoke. "When I hold on the ends of any distance, fold up the world itself for my use. Do you see? Put Kinchinjunga in a valley of the Andes and step from east to west. See the whole world as an illusion, and know that space in the sense in which we live in it does not exist. Dark Lagny knew it, found the infinity outside space."

"And died on a cross outside the wall of Eboracum," he said.

"Because she let human love and human passion deflect her from that greater purpose," she told him. "If one fails, one pays."

"YOU will pay, in any case," he said grimly. "What you showed me is the summit to which Adepts attain, and they reach it after passing through the last gateway in the Path. You think to step on to the Path somewhere near its farther end, to steal in by a side door and avoid all the work of initiation. You will pay, heavily."

"I will, as you say, pay," she retorted. "Not heavily, but as the gods ask—I have got past fear. If you went with me, you knew fear, just as I knew it when I first took that step out of space and time. Fear held me in paralysis, unable to commune with the beings I saw, unable to use the knowledge I had. Then I stepped past fear, and now learn—learn more and more. To be able, as I say, to roll the world up like a paper strip, and move from east to west in a step. Out of time and space—to be a god with the gods of that dimension, ever greater, ever more beyond this world you know, and in the end—"

"Go on!" he bade harshly. "How far will you go, in the end? You small three-dimensional thing like myself—how far will you go, when you claim equality with the Presences I saw?"

"To control of life itself," she said. "To use of another thing scribed on the Rod for me to read. To the use of time, not compulsory movement in it, from youth toward age, but to control of time, life—"

"They thought that in Atlantis," he interrupted, "and the greater gods of the fifth or sixth dimension moved one step, and rolled Atlantis up and put it under the sea. So they will roll you up and put you—somewhere outside space, where you cannot do this harm to the world that you plan. Because mankind is not yet fit—you know it!"

"I have passed fear," she said evenly. "Mankind? No! Here and there one—one like you! One who can pass fear, and in the end—the end I mean to reach—stand up beside the gods outside space and be one with them. Interweave with them, be eternal—"

"Die!" He made a vicious exclamation of the interrupting word.

She laughed, and for the first time he heard no music in the sound. "You have passed fear," she said. "I have. And so I know."

"You are a thief and an interloper," he said harshly. "You own that you use this

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"I've heard her laugh when she's been miles away. Like—like a ghost."

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power—this knowledge, rather—to destroy another human being. Little as I like that being, I tell you you are wrong—you will not be permitted, with that use of the knowledge as a base, to go on to the point you want to reach. You will—die!"

"And then?" She laughed again, and all the music of it was there in the sound. "What is that, when one has seen and moved outside space, as I have? I tell you, I have passed fear. I am Dark Lagny, say, the essence of me indestructible—what is death? A passing out from space—all that is me goes on, lives, where there is no time, where the beauty that is behind my physical self will be my joy—and the joy of the Presences into which I am interwoven, though they are separate from me.

"You—you who have not yet passed fear—you put your arms round me when I asked, and I put mine round you. We were one, but separate—I felt you close to me, and you were apart—when for the thousandth of a moment I took you with me, up to the gate of fear, you were ten worlds away, and yet you held me. This is the mystery—when you have passed fear it will be no mystery to you, but you too will be one with the gods of that world."

"Are you yet one with them?" he asked sombrely.

"I am a child, tottering and clutching at the ends of small distances as that child totters and clutches at chairs and railings, while it learns to walk in the world in which it will presently run alone," she answered. "This is a great new knowledge, and I learn it step by step. Stumble, and so learn a little more. Bruise myself—" she lifted her hand to push back her hair, and so exposed the bruise on her head—"and learn a little more. Grow toward use of that movement as we all grew in childhood to the use of our legs and arms, slowly and with pain and trouble. But surely, toward finality. To grow up in that world beyond the world—that world which cuts across this world and is an unseen part of it—or rather, this seen world is a line drawn through the infinite, a little picture painted on the greatness which lies outside space. Beyond breath and the beating of the heart, beyond warmth and cold—all that is a thought in the mind of the infinite, not real at all. Life itself is not real."

"It is all we have," he objected. "I live—you live."

"We are thoughts of those Minds," she told him. "You have not yet passed fear, as I have, and so you cannot see clearly. You have not talked in the speech that is beyond words—" Abruptly she ceased speaking, as if she knew she had said too much.

"I have this life to live," he said soberly. "I shall live it according to the best—and the worst—that is in me. If you put your arms round me again to drag me into that state I saw, I'd fling you off—I say it is not permitted for you or me or anyone to enter that state, or try to pass out from space into a state where space is not. Go on trying it, and you are doomed—damned! You are worse than the spiritualists groping to establish communion with the dead who have passed—you try to rank yourself with the life a stage beyond astral. Yet not life—it is more than life, a higher rung on the ladder of eternity. A piece of the vastness that lies between the stars—you try to hold it as if it were a bar of chocolate or a peppermint drop! This world of sense and sight, woman, is not for you to play with, a mere jack in a game of bowls."

"I have never played bowls," she said coldly.

He roared laughter at her. "Oh, get back a sense of humour!" he adjured her. "See yourself, very lovely and very human, and stop being a witch! Be human! Give yourself to living interests—you might be so very wonderful, and you're just a thing of fear."

"I tell you—I have passed fear," she insisted.

"Oh, to the devil with that! You yourself may have passed fear, but you play tricks—make others fear. Those poor devils down at the inn—what business have you to upset the current of their lives with what they hear as a ghost laughing at them? What business have you to blind me with what looked like fog? You've no right to interfere with other people's lives—that's where you're all wrong."

"I own that I had no right to blind you," she said slowly. "I wanted you here—wanted to try the experiment I have just tried with you, because there was no other within reach—I couldn't ask Ephraim Knapper to put his arms around me and hold me as you held me. Could I? You know I couldn't. Which was why I tried to get you back, make you come here to me. As for the rest of it—I got hold of the ends of that small distance—it was an experiment. When I laughed, it was because I couldn't help laughing—"

"The human trying to be superhuman, and being no more than human after all," he interrupted. "So you'll fail all along—you are no more than human! If only you had sense enough to see—"

"What?" she asked, as he did not end it.

"Yourself. Were you Har-Ees, back there?"

"Har-Ees?" She echoed the name uncomprehendingly.

"She made Byon-Ge forget that he was Adept—and because of the sin those two sinned—their attempt at putting unfit men on a level with the Adepts—Atlantis was drowned."

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"That is not on the Rod—it is all new to me," she said. "I am not that—what did you call her?"

"Har-Ees. It sounds ugly at first, but if you think it a few times, it's a name that clings and stings."

"You are a man." She smiled up at him as she stood, very near him. "And your judgments are harsh—perhaps on this Har-Ees as they are on me. Yes, I think I like that name. An echo, in a way of . . . Gees."

He looked down into her eyes, and realised as he saw into their luminous depths that complete darkness was very near. How much time had he spent here with her?

He said, "Good-night, Miss Warren," quite conventionally, and went out, leaving her standing there. He had left his hat somewhere, but did not know where to look for it. Nor would he look for it. He went out from the house, and down toward the village and the inn, hurrying before she could blind him with fog, or in some other way force him to go back to her.

He was afraid of her, terribly afraid of her!

TWO lines of Browning's *Abt Vogler,* other than those he had quoted to Miss Brandon, went with Gees as he tramped determinedly toward the inn: two lines, at first, and then the precedent two, so that the four ran in his mind—

"Novel splendours burst forth, grew familiar and dwelt with mine,
Not a point nor peak but found and fixed its wandering star;
Meteor moons, balls of blaze, and they did not pale nor pine,
For earth had attained to heaven, there was no more near nor far."

He repeated it— "'No more near nor far'!" And added, "He knew. Oh, yes, he knew! I don't know, but I have seen."

He went on. Back there at the farm, she was calling to him to come back. She was a witch, and he could feel the call, but he would not go back. No, there was no magic, only applied science—but the woman had power.

He would not go back.

A voice came out from the gloom, "Good evenin', zur."

"Good evening," he answered friendlily, even ingratiatingly. "Who is it? You sound as if you knew me."

"Thadger, zur—Zam Thadger, they moztly calls me."

"Ah, yes! I've got you, Sam. A bit stiff in the joints, by what you said the other night, but still able to sink the odd pint."

Sam Thatcher chuckled. "Zo be it come my waay," he agreed.

"And what are you doing outside The Three Thorns this time of night, if I might ask?" Gees pursued, keeping step with the slow-moving Sam.

"Mus' Timms got a cow calved—I works for Mus' Timms," Sam explained. "Cow's calved—mozly they calves arter midnight, but zhe wur moor conzidable (Gees divined that he meant to say considerate) an' dropped en. Rackon I arned a pint, stoppin' laate."

"And now you're going to get it," Gees suggested.

"Arter I put missis quiet," Sam said. "I goes hoam, an' then—my pint. Wunnerful good f'r the innards, is beer."

"Is that so?" Gees put a vast amount of curiosity into the query.

"Yu be gooin' to see Mus' Todd, zur," Sam said with cold dignity. "I'm gooin' hoam. Gi' you goo'-night, zur."

He branched away, though he might have continued another score yards with Gees toward the inn doorway. The ironic question had got under his skin, evidently, and Gees regretted it. One had to be careful with these men. They were on their own ground, and he was a mere furriner among them. Furriners must not take even verbal liberties.

Within a yard of the inn door, he stopped abruptly. Those two glasses—they still stood, filled for the second time, on the little ebony table. Rather, they had so stood when he left the green and crimson room. She would have moved them by now, emptied them.

It was nothing: rather it was an absurdity that such a trifle should recur to his mind as if it had some importance. In the tremendous moment through which she had impelled him to live, he had forgotten all about the refilled glass, and now he had a feeling that he ought to have drunk its contents. A curious fluid, like nothing he had ever tasted or smelt. Dark Lagny's brew, Ira had said.

Resolutely he put it from his mind, and opened the inn door to enter. Three of the worthies, Carphin, Hodden and Cowder, had already begun their evening session, and they gave him grave "Evenin', zur," as he moved toward the bar, a greeting that he returned cheerfully, while he took in the man who stood, one elbow on the bar and a glass beside it, a new figure in the place, as far as Gees was concerned.

A middle-aged man in shabby but evidently well cut brown tweeds and heavy brogue shoes, muddied and—by the look of them—seldom cleaned. From under an ancient and slightly greasy-banded soft felt hat his grizzled, bristly hair showed, and under it his

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smallish grey eyes had a humorous cast, while between them his nose was beaky and slightly purplish. His hands were small and well-shaped, not the hands of a manual worker. He said, as Gees approached, "Good evening. My name is Firth, from that mansion across the green. Since we don't get a stranger here every year, I thought I'd drop across."

He was likable on sight, and Gees said, pointing to his half-emptied glass, "Good evening, Mr. Firth. Will you have another? My name is Green, from London. And I feel like a pint of bitter, Mr. Todd!"

"A distinctive name and a comprehensive address," Firth remarked drily. "And a welcome invitation—" He took up his glass and emptied it. "Yes, I will have a half-pint with you, Mr. Green. Thank you."

"Ah!" Gees watched Todd busy at the barrel on trestles behind the bar, and put down a half-crown. "Good spot for a rest cure, this."

"One needs some interest," Firth remarked. "Mine's bugs."

"You—er—farm them?" Gees asked blandly. "Or trade them for—what? It's a specialized line, of course."

"Collect," Firth told him. "I had a big practice in South London—I'm a doctor by profession—and my health gave out, just as a legacy came to me from a grateful patient. So I bought the house on the other side of the green, intending to put in week-ends here. That was six years ago. The fourth week-end didn't end—I'm here yet."

"Collecting bugs," Gees ended for him, thoughtfully. "Well—" He took up his pint. "Here's to bugs. Dorset bugs. And you."

"Your very good health," Firth responded. "I was always more inclined to entomology than to the physical mechanism of my fellow man, and there are some fascinating things to study in this district. An entirely distinct variant of the small red ant—I did a monograph on it that got published and fetched Sir Hercules Madison down here to see my slides of the brain and thorax—you know his name, I expect?"

"He is a new one on me," Gees confessed solemnly. "Another enthusiast, I take it. In your particular line. Bugs, that is."

"Sir Hercules is the leading authority—the final court of appeal if any question arises," Firth told him. "Ah—good evening, Thatcher."

Sam, entering, said, "Evenin', zur," and advanced to the remote end of the bar from the two against it, to call for his ha'f pint. He added, severely, to Gees, "I zeed yu avore, zur," took his glass, and retreated to seat himself with his cronies.

"Staying long, Mr. Green?" Firth inquired friendlily.

Gees shook his head. "Just a flying visit," he answered.

"Fine car you run. Not much use for it here, though."

"No-o." Gees breathed the negative softly, uninterestedly.

"I see you've already found the best view about here," Firth remarked, with a shade of nervousness at introducing the subject.

"This afternoon, you mean," Gees observed calmly. "I'd hardly say I found it. I made what you might call a personally conducted visit."

"I don't know if it interests you," Firth said, still more nervously, "but every soul in this place has talked over that walk of yours."

"Including yourself?" Gees asked with ironic amusement.

"Having nobody to talk with me, I am the exception. Do have a refill with me, Mr. Green. I feel like one more."

"Very hospitable of you. Yes, I will—another pint, Todd. I was very well aware that I made myself conspicuous. Not for nothing."

"No?" Firth looked his curiosity at the statement.

"No," The retort was final, indicated that the subject was closed.

"Ah! Umm-m! I was remembering, just before you came in, that it will be five years to-morrow since her father—since Cornell Warenn died. And each anniversary the daughter goes to the churchyard—the only day in the year that she goes near the church—and puts a hawthorn branch on the grave. Shrivelled leaves and berries and all on it, and nothing else. An odd idea, I always think."

"THE lady might think bug-collecting an odd idea," Gees said drily.

"Oh, quite probably she does! I see very little of her—hardly ever run across her, in fact. There is no doctor in the place, as you may guess, and I volunteered to attend her father in his last illness. She—accepted my services. There was nothing to be done, really. A man's heart gives out on him, and that's the finish."

"So," Gees remarked. "There was, I believe, a case here in another direction. Pneumonia at mid-summer, or something like it."

"At the Hall—yes." Firth looked as if he would question the reason for Gees's interest, but did not question. "That was sheer foolishness. I had nothing to do with it—a Blandford practitioner was fetched over, and then a London specialist. From what I could understand of it, there was predisposition in the first place—pulmonary weakness—and the lady was out in a thunderstorm, didn't change her wet clothing in time, caught a chill, and—well!"

"And the child?" Gees asked after a pause.

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"Ah! I think all the health inspectors in the county tried to find out why that happened. Naylor had taken the child to London to see what could be done about developing astigmatism, and I think the bacilli got at her there. She was a very delicate little thing, puny and undersized. He brought her back and—it was diphtheria killed her. She might have got over the fever—probably would. May have caught it in London, and then again it may have been flies. Infecting milk, or food—something. A terrible thing for him."

"A terrible thing for any man," Gees observed.

"Yes, but—if you'd seen him before he lost those two—contrast that with what he is now! An utterly different man."

Gees remembered the album of photographs Naylor had bidden him look over. But, he reflected, though Ira Warenn had claimed (in some measure) responsibility for Naylor's losses, it appeared by what Firth said that they were due to natural causes. There remained the death of his favourite dog, but a veterinary surgeon had attributed that, too, to a natural cause. Here was ground for some relief.

Why? He pulled himself up sharply. Why should he feel relief over acquitting her of having caused Naylor's losses? And could he acquit her, in spite of what Firth had said? She had powers, as she had proved to him this afternoon, and they might extend in other directions. She had been able to produce the illusion of a fog and with it had almost driven him back to herself. What other illusions could she produce—had she worked against the dead woman and child, produced illusions that had caused their deaths? Willed them to die—willed the child within reach of infection, and the woman to a folly of carelessness that had killed her?

Past telling, he knew. He was still silent, reflecting over it, when Todd moved along behind the bar to stop opposite him.

"'Fraid we couldn't git much for ye tonight, sir," he said in a confidential aside not intended for Firth's ears. "There's plenty sausages, an' the eggs, an' the ham—I tried to git some fish, but he'd sold out all but a couple o' little haddicks which was mostly skin."

"Then you can make it sausages and eggs and ham," Gees told him.

"Come across and share a bone with me tomorrow night, Mr. Green," Firth invited. "It would be pleasure to eat with my fellowman."

"Now that's very kind of you," Gees answered, "but I don't know if I'll be here tomorrow night. Still, thank you all the same."

"If you are here, say. Just walk across to my place—you can leave it open, and join me at my meal if you turn up by seven-thirty. If you don't, I shall understand that you can't. Leave it so."

"That sounds brotherly enough," Gees answered, "and if I am on the spot and able to accept, I shall be very glad indeed to join you."

Declining another refill, Firth bade goodnight and went out, and Gees remained by the bar until Todd should announce that a meal was ready for him. The worthies along the side of the room talked among themselves, with the deliberateness of their kind, and in tones evidently not intended to reach his ears: that they talked at all while he was present showed that they meant to accept him among them, though strictly on furriner status.

Jacob Cowder spoke. "Dangersome. No doubt about it."

"Reglar zavidge," Phil Hodden agreed after a lengthy pause. "Git wuss, it du. As sune fly at ye as look at ye."

Gees listened intently. Were they discussing Adolphus the boar? But no. The next remark proved that they were not.

"It mind him." Sam Thatcher delivered a judicial opinion. "While it mind him, it don't hu't nobody. An' if Zquire ain't got a right tu taake a hound when he goo ridin'—"

He left it at that, and the end of the sentence needed no vocalisation. A silence, and then Jacob Cowder, the original complainant as nearly as Gees could tell, voiced another protest—

"It *look* dangersome," he said. "I 'ouldn't keer f'r en to coom sniffin' round me. Them teeth look a hem tu sharp, f'r my likin'."

Todd leaned toward Gees. "'T's all riddy, sir," he announced. "Phyllis done ye four sausages—they run six to the pound—an' four eggs, an' ham along of it. That'll be enough, sir?"

"If it isn't," Gees answered, "I'll shout. Four sausages and four eggs." He passed behind the bar as Todd lifted the flap. "God help us all! To say nothing about the ham!"

"I reckoned, sir, seein' yu had that long walk this arternoon, yu might be sharp-set f'r yure vittles. I *hope* that it'll be enough f'r yu."

"You can have faith as well as hope," Gees told him. "I've already found out that charity is no stranger in this pub, so you're safe on all three. I think I'll say good-night, because by the time I stagger up to my room after that meal I shan't be able to speak."

"Like some tea wi' it, sir, or another pint?"

"I never mix my drinks, Todd. Tea on beer! Unthinkable!"

"I'll bring it along, sir. Right at once."

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A CLOUDED morning, with moisture in the air—there was no rain, as yet—and thin scud driving over the heights which shut in Troyarbour, telling that the outer world was troubled by a wind, though here in the valley was stillness. Gees slept late, found yet more eggs and ham awaiting him on descending to the "coffee room," and, having eaten, went out to the shed at the back and gazed at his car. The amount of mud it had collected on the run along the lane indicated that a hose with plenty of pressure behind it was the only means by which cleanliness could be regained without scratching the gloss of the surface, and he gave it up.

He went out and along the winding branch of lane that would take him as far as the church. He wanted to see the church. By-and-by, when he got rid of his present almost somnolent indifference, he would plan what to do next to make Naylor regret stopping payment of that cheque. When he had got the eighteen guineas, he would entrust it to Todd with instructions to dole out pints to the worthies for as long as it lasted. They need not know who was responsible for the munificence or why it was bestowed on them: a sort of fund, with Todd as trustee. . . .

The church proved uninteresting. There had been brasses, but no more than the studs in the stone remained. Of memorial tablets he could find none. As nearly as he could tell, the fabric dated no farther back than the sixteenth century. In all probability, when the castle of the Warenns had existed where the Hall now stood, there had been a place of pre-Reformation worship as part of the establishment. This church had replaced that earlier gathering-place.

Well, that was that. Some Naylor had put in a stained glass window to the memory of Eleanor his wife, and, knowing a little about the colour-values of medieval stained glass, Gees felt that this squire of Troyarbour had done his early-Victorian worst—or the craftsman who had done the work had done *his* worst. There was a collecting box for foreign missions in the porch, and Gees grinned at it. Sam Thatcher and his friends treated furriners warily. So would he, Gees.

He saw a curly tail, termination of a line of bristles, whisk past the nearest buttress of the church as he emerged to the mugginess of outer air, and remembered Firth's remark to the effect that Ira Warenn came near the church once a year, to place a branch of hawthorn on her father's grave. An odd sort of tribute, but no concern of his—she did as she liked. And bringing a boar pig into the churchyard—well, it was her boar pig. Nothing whatever to do with him.

He went slowly, thoughtfully, back toward the inn. Should he leave Naylor to his own devices—apparently there was no means of getting at the man—and run the car out and go back to London forthwith? He could be discussing fourth-dimensional experiences with Miss Brandon soon after lunch time—he could discuss anything on earth or out of it with that girl, he knew, and she never let him down. And Naylor and his eighteen guineas meant nothing, in reality: only the humiliation—if it were that—of being "done" had fetched him, Gees, back here. It was a petty reason for coming all this way, when one thought it over. Yes, he would go back, rule out Troyarbour and all in it from his scheme of things, and find something more worthwhile in some one of the inquiries that reached his office by each day's post.

With that resolve he quickened his pace. Merely to throw his pyjamas and other belongings back into the suitcase, back the car out of the shed after settling up with Todd, and—

In the after days, he never cared to think much of what followed on that resolve: it was too ugly, too nightmarish. . . .

Jerome St. Pol Naylor came riding on a big chestnut hunter, riding down from the Hall toward the main village and the frontage of the inn. It was a powerful beast that he rode, up to far more than his weight, and, following him, came the hound to which the worthies of the inn had alluded in their talk the preceding evening. A hound with a muzzle that, Gees estimated, would touch him at the waist-line—and he was just over six feet in height. A vast-chested brute, with tapering, almost borzoi fineness of jaw-line—but behind the muzzle were eyes deeply sunken, bloodshot and furtive. And on its great paws the beast slouched heavily, as might an overfed Great Dane—it was no lightly-stepping hound, but the mastiff build, powerful and formidable.

The girl Phyllis came out from the post-office, just as Naylor rode past the doorway. Looking up at him as he passed, she had almost missed sight of the great hound, until it nosed up to her, sniffing at her as she went across the grass toward the inn. At that—Gees was just emerging from the lane toward the church, then—she screamed and struck at the brute, and her open hand landed on its muzzle.

On the instant it leaped and had her down, screaming horribly: its long teeth fastened in her shoulder, and it shook her slight form as a terrier shakes a rabbit—and Naylor swung his horse about, his crop raised while he shouted—"Rollo! *Rollo!*" He might as well

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have shouted to the wind or the racing clouds over him: the hound had something to worry, and took no heed of him.

RUNNING toward the prostrate girl and the great beast that worried her, Gees heard behind him a voice—it was not loud, but had a carrying power that threw the words down into his consciousness—"Dolph! Kill that dog! Kill, I say! The dog! Kill!"

A ridiculous pattering of tiny hooves, the split hooves of swine, and the boar went past Gees—he himself was running, but that lightning charge left him as if he might have been standing still. He saw the line of bristles on the boar's back stand up as it passed him, saw its charge, and saw that the great hound released its hold on the now unconscious girl to face this assailant—and Naylor tried to strike at hound and boar, but could not get the horse to face them. It swerved and wheeled about, and Gees had time to think the rider a poor horseman while he saw the fight between hound and boar.

A brief fight. Adolphus charged in, a flying fury, and from the snapping of his jaws a tusk took the hound low and behind the thorax, disemboweling him so that his entrails fell and tangled under him. Yet he lived, and, living, got a jaw hold on the boar's hide, just behind the shoulder, where he hung on and worried, dying as he was—till Adolphus, with an incredible turn of his thick neck, got the hound's muzzle between his mighty jaws, and crushed it with a sound of splintering bones. Blood poured from the wound the hound had made in his shoulder, and pig-like, he squealed at the pain and sight of his own blood, but took a fresh grip after squealing, farther back toward the hound's neck, and crushed its head to pulp. By that time, both Gees and Ira Warenn were abreast the combatants, and she said, "Well done, Dolph! Oh, well done! Brave Dolph! Well done!"

Bent over the unconscious girl, by that time, Gees was aware that Firth, the ex-doctor, was bending over her too. Firth said, "Get your hands under her, Mr. Green. Lift her and hand her to me—both lift, and get her up into my hold. I'll carry her home and dress this bite." And, on that, Gees lifted, and got the limp body into Firth's arms, to see him walk off with it toward his double-fronted house as if he had been carrying a small child.

A sound of trampling, thunderous hooves—Gees started up and back, and saw that Naylor was trying to ride down Ira Warenn. Stark murder looked out from the man's mad eyes, and his riding crop was lifted to strike the girl down—but within ten paces of her the big chestnut came down to stillness with a thudding of its forefeet, and stood, shuddering like a human being. So Gees saw the power she had over animals, and remembered Farmer Timms' bull.

She said, "Not so, Jerome Naylor! Look there!" She pointed at the headless, mangled remnants of the dead hound. "Will you kill more of your servants? Shall I set my pig to kill your horse?"

"Ah, witch! Devil woman—you curse! You spawn of hell!"

He slid down from the chestnut, and, terrified by the smell of blood, it turned and galloped away toward the Hall. Naylor ran at the girl, his eyes blazing—it came to Gees as a curious reflection that he had never seen eyes literally blaze until that moment—and the riding crop upraised to strike her down. A baresark fit was on him. He saw nothing but his enemy, the personification of Dark Lagny, and he, Oger's son, was bent on her destruction—until, like the horse, he was within striking distance of her.

Then he stopped, and Gees knew that in this baresark fit the man was all animal, not human at all. And Ira Warenn had power over animals, such power as is given to few. Jerome Naylor stopped dead: the crop thudded to the ground, and he pitched forward on his face, senseless. It was the culmination of the fit, end of his madness.

THE boar licked at his bleeding shoulder. Ira Warenn said, caressingly, "Dolph—come here! Good Dolph! Come here!" And the beast got up and went to her, blood trickling from where the hound's jaws had closed in its hide. She scratched along its back. "Oh, good Dolph," she said again, and there was honey in her voice. "If you were human I'd love you, Dolph—and you're just a beast! No, don't touch it! Come here! Don't touch it!"

For with a little "Wouff" that was half a question, the intelligent brute had turned to sniff toward where Naylor lay still. It turned back at Ira's command, and Martha Kilmain, the postmistress, stalked primly out from her doorway, gathered up Naylor in her mighty arms as if he had been a baby, and with him stalked back and disappeared among the cheese and *lingerie* and bacon and boots and stationery and cigarettes and all else that her multifarious store contained.

She vanished: a curious circle of villagers looked on the mangled heap that, so little while ago, had been a living beast: looked on Gees, and Ira Warenn, and the boar Adolphus that licked and licked at the lessening flow of blood from its wound—and occasionally looked toward Martha Kilmain's door-

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way, or toward Firth's front door—closed again, now—as if to learn what had happened with regard to the savaged girl, or the berserk man whose fit had ended in unconsciousness.

Ira said, "You didn't do anything, but you couldn't have done more than you did—or didn't. There wasn't time. I want to doctor Dolph. Do you mind much if I take him back, now?"

"Who am I to mind?" he asked acridly.

She shook her head. "The one man who let me take him to dare the unknown," she answered. "I know you are going back—will you come to say good-bye to me before you go?"

He looked hard at her and answered, "I am not sure."

She laughed—and the music of the laugh stayed with him until he saw her again. She quoted, very softly—

"Time stoops to no man's lure:
And love, grown faint and fretful,
With lips but half regretful
Sighs, and with eyes forgetful
Weeps that no loves endure."

He said, with ironic amusement, "Don't they? How do you know?"

"Empirically," she answered, and let the one word stand alone.

"Maybe. Has it struck you that we are the hub of a wheel made of staring Troyarboreans—I made that word all by myself, and it's up to you to applaud me. But I don't like quite so much audience. What do we do next? I mean, in order to get out of this publicity?"

"What do you want to do?" she asked.

"The intelligent and hospitable Todd told me there would be chops for lunch. That, if I know him, means half a sheep, or thereabouts. The village is listening, on that outer circle. Be careful."

She reflected over it. "Four o'clock?" she asked at last, with a gleam of human mischief in the eyes he had known, so far, as no other than boding and fateful.

"Four o'clock is the nearest hour I'm to," he said. "Work it out, and subtract yourself plus me from the answer. Plus, remember!"

She said, "You are a fool."

"Columbus discovered a continent," he retorted. "I think you've gone one better. You said four o'clock. I say four o'clock. Two minds with but a single time."

"You idiot!"

"Why the pronoun? Don't be redundant."

She left him. Adolphus stopped licking himself, and followed her, and Gees went slowly, indifferent to curious gazing, toward the inn.

CHAPTER VI

THE MADNESS OF JEROME NAYLOR

"Y'SEE, sir, poor little Phyllis—I reckon them chops ain't fit f'r yu to eat. I done 'em meself, but she's all hu't an' shook up be that blasted brute—an' I ain't done no taters. Yu'll ha' to overlook, sir—I'm all shook up too. Y'see, Phyllis—"

"That'll do, Todd. I'd sooner eat raw chops or none at all than see you worried like this. You go and look after the girl—stop bothering about me. I can look after myself—it wouldn't be the first time I've done it. Stop bothering, and hustle back to her."

"Mr. Firth's lookin' arter her, sir. An' all you're payin' me, an' me not lookin' arter you like I ought—"

"Todd, if you say one more word I'll heave a chop at you—I can spare one without bothering, and two if you don't shut up. Buzz off!"

With a stare that became almost a grin before it ended, Todd went to the door. There he said, "If you want anything, sir—"

"Yeah, peace and chops," Gees interrupted. "Leave me to it, and go and keep an eye on that girl, as—" He ended the sentence to the closed door—"I know you're yearning to. Naturally."

An inquiry, later, told him that the girl would recover from the shock of the hound's attack in a day or two. She had some sort of heart trouble, Firth said, but it was not serious.

Firth smiled. "And you're coming along to eat this evening?"

"If the gods are good. Do we talk bugs?"

"We talk whatever you like."

"I'll be along before seven-thirty, or bust. Count on me," Gees told him.

Four o'clock, Ira Warenn had said. It was half past three when Gees told Firth to count on him, and set off on foot for Wren's farm. He had himself fully under control again, now: facing her for the last time before setting out for London (for he had finished with Naylor, and the eighteen-guinea cheque might go hang!) he would not attempt to excuse himself. She could think what she liked—.

Abruptly came the realisation that she had dominated all that sequence of events. He had to admire her for the way in which she had kept her head, impelled the boar to save Phyllis and destroy the hound, and then controlled first the horse and after it Naylor him-

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self, rendering both impotent against her. They had had no chance, but had receded from her as waves from a rock. Yes, a rock. She had lost no iota of her composure. He, Gees, had been shaken by the sight of a man gone baresark, shaken so that he resorted to a small foolishness to cover his loss of self-control. She had stood apart from and over all that had happened, unmoved and dominant.

Pale sunlight emphasized the shabbiness of the farmhouse frontage. Emphasized, too, the ridiculous appearance of Adolphus the boar, not lying down, but sitting up as he leaned against the wall not far from the doorway, with a big patch of plaster over the wound the hound had made behind his shoulder. He turned his head to give Gees a look in which was permission to pass in, and there was in it, too, an admission that Adolphus was exceedingly sorry for himself. Loss of blood, probably accounted for his state. Lying beside him was Peter the cat, in his fashion keeping watch over the pig to see that he came to no harm—so Gees saw it. Or had Ira Warenn posed the pair of them there for him to see? Never before had he seen a pig look sorry for itself, but Adolphus' expression was unmistakable. She could render animals almost human, so much power had she over them.

The door was open, and he saw her advance along the narrow hallway, clad now in a fleecy frock that had the colour of the walls in the green and crimson room, and he saw that she was wearing the pendant of the turquoise-blue stone, and high-heeled shoes that toned in with the colour of the frock. She said, "I thought you would have had the car," with no preliminary greeting.

"I haven't," he answered baldly, standing on the doorstep and facing her. "If you mean you thought I should drop in on my way to London, I've got an appointment to dine with Firth this evening. The man who took that girl off to dress her hurt this morning."

"I know." She drew back a step. "Do come in, won't you? So you will be here till to-morrow." She spoke the last sentence over her shoulder as he followed her along the hallway, and turned in at the doorway of the green and crimson room. Following her, he said, "Yes, I shall be here some part of to-morrow, at least," and detested himself for the banality of the reply.

THE door of the room closed slowly, with no aid from either of them, and he heard its latch click. She asked, "What is on your mind, Mr. Green? Something—I can see it. Something . . . disturbing you."

"It is disturbing," he answered. "The fool I made of myself and you called me this morning and you—splendid. You were splendid."

She shook her head and smiled, the smile that was of her eyes and left her lips uncurved. "I was terrified," she owned. "It was all so swift—all passed so suddenly. I was terrified—whatever I did was automatic, outside myself. You—you helped by being silly, talking as you did. The relief of it—something to divert my thoughts."

"That makes you still more splendid," he told her.

She laughed. "What is this—a mutual admiration party?" she asked ironically. "Or a farewell?"

"Neither, I hope," he answered, and put emphasis into it.

"No?" Still more of irony sounded in the question. "Will you stay here in Troyarbour to see the end of Jerome Naylor, or shall I come to you in London? Our two ways have touched on each other, but they must diverge again. You know it as I know it."

"I do," he agreed soberly. "I'd never travel your path. It ends—I told you where it ends, when you showed it to me."

"And I told you that is nothing to me," she answered defiantly, half angrily. "Told you, too, that I have passed fear. You have not."

"What made you quote Swinburne at me to-day?" he asked abruptly.

She shook her head. "It came into my mind," she answered. "'Time stoops to no man's lure.' Just that. The rest that I quoted—his music, nothing else. It has—had no meaning. For me in relation to you, I mean. Where there is no beginning, there can be no end."

"Quite so." He made it an acrid comment. "And now, all being said, do we say good-bye? Or am I being boorish to my hostess?"

"Till we have said good-bye, all is not said," she retorted.

"Not worthy of you, that, Ira," he said gravely. "It's the sort of thing an ingénue might heave at a casual partner at her first dance."

"Perhaps—but I meant it. All is *not* said!"

Her eyes were but a little distance from his own. She gazed full at him as he spoke, and he too gazed, intently, yet still he could not determine the colour of the eyes. They smiled—only the eyes. The scent of her hair reached him, and with it came back Naylor's description of her—"allure unutterable." It was true.

He said, "You are a witch. A witch—dangerous."

"There is no magic. You agreed—there is no magic. Would you like some tea, Mr.

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Green? Ephraim Knapper's boy will have to go and milk the cows, soon, but I can get him to make us some tea first, if you'd like it. He's my housemaid, which is why the other room looks so terrible. Would you like some tea?"

"No. Tea in here would be like a starched collar round Adolphus' neck. Like treacle on that frock you're wearing."

"Do you like my frock?" She was no witch, but all woman, as she asked the question. "I put it on specially."

"It's—well, the mere man always says the wrong thing if he tries to say anything about what a woman wears. And now I think of it—what became of the stuff in those glasses?"

She looked puzzled. "What stuff? What glasses?" she asked.

"When I went away from here, we left two full glasses there—" he pointed at the ebony table on which still stood the red lacquer bowl—and, pointing, saw in the bowl a powdery greenness that he knew might be incense of a sort. "I remembered them, after I'd gone, and—it was just an inconsequent thought—" He broke off, rather lamely.

She said, "Yes. I put the contents of those glasses in a flat bowl, and Adolphus was very happy. Quite muzzy, in fact."

"The swine actually appreciated the pearls."

She frowned. "I don't like that. You know as I know that the pig is nearest to man in brain content, not to be despised. I couldn't say to any other class of animal, 'Kill that dog!' and know he would not harm the girl the dog was trying to kill. Adolphus is my brave and loyal friend, more than any dog."

He said, acidly, "I apologise. To Adolphus."

"Sit there." She pointed at the divan, at a point opposite the ebony table on which stood the bowl. "Wait."

As he moved to obey the order, she turned and left the room. He saw the door swing closed behind her, and heard the latch click. He knew there was a magic in this room, in spite of her denial of the existence of magic. It was in some way separate from the normal world outside—time itself was different, here. Turning as he sat, he looked up at the green and crimson sails in the picture. Was the green sail part of the painting, or did it move, an actuality rather than a flare of colour against the background of white wall and blue sky? Blue like the stone she wore on her breast, white like the whiteness of her neck, green like the frock she had "put on specially." She was a witch. This room was a witch's parlour—

SHE returned, bringing the squat, ugly bottle and the two glasses of paper thinness, with stalks like threads. They had known, when those glasses were fashioned, how to render glass tensile and malleable—the secret had gone with that of Roman cement, of interweaving living trees, of taming African elephants to servitude. When she put the glasses down on the ebony table he took up one to look at it, and the bowl of it quivered on the impossibly slender stem.

"Supposing I broke it?" he asked.

She took up the other glass, and tied a knot in the stem, to put it down again with the bowl awry. "Well?" she asked.

He took up the glass, and found that he could untie the knot as if it had been made in a length of cord. He said, "I don't think I like you, Ira. Is the moon made of green cheese?"

"There isn't any moon. It's just as much an illusion as time and space—as you and I are here. We are thoughts in a greater mind—all is a thought in a mind past our knowing—we are not, nor have ever been. And yet we are—" She poured the crimson fluid into the glasses. "And that is. Instead of tea—you wanted this."

He asked, "How did you know I wanted it?" and laughed a little.

"Because you remembered, and asked about it. Drink—with me."

Lifting the glass he felt it quiver on its stem, and drank hastily. As before, he felt the warmth of the drink, a tingling sweetness that yet was acid, a sensation rather than a taste. When he put the empty glass down, she put hers down empty beside it, and refilled them both from the bottle. Then she seated herself beside him on the divan, and the two filled glasses stood before them.

"Let me tell you," she said. "Once on a time you were in a green and silver room—not green and crimson, like this. You had an illusion with you, and with her you drank—as you drink this wine of mine. But that was a magic drink, and you lost yourself—the illusion willed you to lose yourself. Is that not so?"

"How do you know? Yes, it was so, but how do you know?"

"When you and I held each other, I took you beyond space, for a moment. I saw all your mind, all your thoughts and memories, like a picture. Things you yourself have forgotten—do you know that nothing you have ever done or said or thought is lost? That it is all *there*, painted on the fabric of your brain?"

He nodded assent. "Yes, I know that. Memory may be faulty, but it is all there, as you say. And you could see it?"

"Your secretary—I don't know her name. The girl who died, the man you brought to

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justice—they hanged him for murder—an old man I think is your father—a woman who saved your life one night, and a falling airplane that was lost in the sea. And money you took—"

"You are most decidedly a witch," he interrupted. "Stop it!"

"It was there for me to read. I have passed fear. On the farther side of fear is power, sight, hearing—you felt them all as possible. I know them as realities. And you—you with your greater knowledge of all that lies this side of fear—I want to persuade you to share that other side with me. To be one with me in it."

He shook his head. "That is forbidden," he said. "I'm going to end my human life in three dimensions, not risk destruction trying to fathom the fourth, as you do. I tell you—it is forbidden."

"I say it is not!"

"So Har-Ees said, and wrecked a continent."

"What became of her?"

"How should I know?" He sounded almost querulous. "I'd say the fishes scraped the meat off her bones, if any fishes were left alive after the convulsion that destroyed Atlantis. She died with the rest of them. Very few escaped—your ancestors must have been among them."

"I think you know all there is to be known on this side of fear. And if you with your knowledge passed it—if I could make you come past it and find your way as I am finding mine— Oh, don't you see? We two might fold up the world, rule it—be gods in it!"

"The eternal thirst," he said slowly. "Power—whether fit to use it or no. Damnation! I have known women, and it is always the same. Power over a man—the sense that they can control and hold him down—or else power such as you want. You're so great, and yet so small. You are *all* the same, you women! To give as pleases you, and to take when it pleases you to take—and apart from your pleasure a man may wait and question and hunger—you want *power!* You'd have me share in this dominion—Ira, you're wonderful, were wonderful today, but you're a woman, and you want me to follow along your path!"

"Well?" She put a mocking note into the question.

"To please you. Not that I and you may rule the world, but that *you* and *I* may rule I've trouble enough to rule myself."

She took up one of the two glasses and handed it to him. "You are irrational," she said. "Drink again, or I'll offer you tea."

He laughed. "It's getting late," he said. "Ephraim's boy must have gone milking by this time, and you'd have to make the tea yourself. Still—here's to Har-Ees, and Dark Lagny—and you!"

HE DRANK, as she drank with him, the second glass. For a moment he resisted the spell, knew why the glasses had been left filled when he had last gone out from this room. There had been no need of them, then, for he had not refused Ira's "experiment." Now, while the moment lasted, he knew that she had taken this drugging means of making him repeat it, and then questioned inwardly—why should he resist? For the effect of that second drink was such as to nullify cold reason, and leave in its place contentment, almost indifference. So much so that, when as before she put her arms round him for that strange, passionless embrace and willed him to hold her, he felt little more than that she was good to hold, even in such a fashion as this.

"Still!" She whispered the word. "Let me take you past Fear."

So for the second time she tried to take him with her beyond time and space, but this experience was not as that other had been. He knew himself one with her, yet separated from her by all infinity. He knew light beyond light, sound beyond all sound, and the scent of all the flowers of Eden blended in with reek from the fires of hell—yet hell itself was a part of the great scheme of things, and so part of the great heaven that was, and yet was not. All incredibilities were real, and all realities incredible.

He saw a point of radiance far off and, gazing at it, knew it was near—knew that he looked into the light of her unknowable eyes. He shaped the thought—"I lose and find you," and she was not near, but removed from him an infinity—she receded so far that he could not see her, yet she was warm in his hold. If only he could get past Fear, he would comprehend this mystery.

Fear! A shape that had no shape, a Thing that stood inexorably between him and knowledge. He knew that in this second experiment she had failed even more than in the first of them. In that, she had so far taken him with her that he was very near on moving as she moved, near on comprehending the relation between that fourth direction of movement with the three that he knew.

Now, there was a world that he saw and felt and smelt and heard, a greatness that comprehended so many dimensions as to have none—and it was not for him. Fear stood before it, as the angel stood in the gateway of Eden. There was a long and difficult pathway leading to another gate by which one might enter, a path untrodden by this witch's feet. She was

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a trespasser who had no right there, one who at some point would be judged for her trespass, and for the lawless use of the knowledge she had gained from the Rod.

In some part of this experience he was able to see her and comprehend her misuse of her knowledge. It was and yet was not wilful misuse. That she perverted it to so small an aim was a defect bred in her race from the days of Oger and Wulfrana, a cancer of the mind that she could no more root out than an oak can root out the mistletoe which lived on its sap. She *had* to pursue that feud to its end, he saw, to adjust a balance that ought never to have been disturbed. He could see her and see this of her, then. Afterwards, back in normality, he could not comprehend it. Only in this abnormality could he see why it had to be. Between them, she and Jerome Naylor must redress the balance that Oger and Sigurd the Volsung had thrown out of truth.

In this again was a mystery, for in human experience two wrongs can never add up to a right. But beyond Fear is neither wrong nor right, he knew while this state lasted. All is, all has ever been, and all will be—a completeness in which apparent right and apparent wrong are both, equally, fulfilments of infinite law, opposed facets in infinite order, and of equal value in it. Only beyond Fear, at a point which he could not reach, was this apparent contradiction reconciled. For him, it must remain uncomprehended.

And now he sank down and down, out from light and sound and scent into a darkness that was infinite as the light had been. He lost all consciousness of Ira's holding him, tried desperately to retain hold on himself and stay this plunge into measureless depths. Down and down and down, past all worlds and suns, past the outermost nebulae of space, past all of space itself, and far, far past time. Into nothingness—was this death?

SOMETHING cold and wet across his forehead, and a tang of brandy in his mouth. Lifting his hand, he found the thing on his head was a wet cloth, and he pulled it off, turning his eyes to see Ira Warenn kneeling beside the divan on which he now lay flat—and the room was lighted by an incandescent paraffin lamp which stood on one of the little ebony tables. So gazing at her, he saw that in her eyes which he had not seen at any other time. There was no witch left in her, only human woman, and in this guise she had a power that he felt.

"You—I was frightened," she said tremulously. "For you."

Slowly he sat up, and swung his feet over the edge of the divan to sit beside her. He felt no ill effect after what he knew, by the lighted lamp, must have been a period of hours. He asked, "Frightened? Why should you be? I've been asleep, I suppose?"

"I—couldn't waken you," she told him. "You were like one dead. And so—the brandy and the cold water—I was terrified."

"You, who have passed Fear," he said slowly. "You—afraid!"

"For you—whether I had taken the spirit of you so far that it could not return. Because—you don't know the way as I do. And you lay so still, breathed so very little. I tried all ways—"

He made no reply, but sat looking before him until she bent to look up into his eyes. She asked, "What are you thinking?"

"You have found a new power," he said. "You think you can take it to your use and roll the world up in your hands—after you have in some measure used it to destroy an enemy. You see yourself greater than any other, and I think, in trying to get me to share the greatness, you have discovered how small you are—how far from complete use of this power. As you yourself said, a little child trying to walk, staggering and clutching at things to hold you up.

"Not in your lifetime, Ira, will this use of a fourth direction be achieved. I think, myself, that mankind will never achieve it—will not be permitted to play with the world in that way. I *think* that. It may be that a generation or two hence a man or woman here and there will have grown up to the use of this knowledge—this tremendous knowledge. But until then, until one or more come fit and ready—"

"I want to tell you you are wrong—and I can't," she said. "I don't know. I feel, after this experience with you, that I have not fully passed fear. Else, I should not fear the singing of the sword—I do fear it, because I cannot understand it. And when you lay there, dead all but the breathing and the beating of your heart— Oh, my dear! My dear! That I had left you there—lost you!"

"Why the emotion?" he asked drily. "There was none when you held me to take me with you, and asked me to hold you. It was all—practical, part of an experiment outside emotion."

"I wouldn't—" She leaned forward and spoke whisperingly, her face averted from his sight. "I wouldn't let you know—"

"No?" He kept to a matter-of-fact tone. "Why let me know now?"

"Because—so near on losing you, I myself learned.. That I'd made you hold me as a lover might hold me, and held you, knew what might be, if . . . don't you understand?

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The first man's arms, the first man's strength wakening me—why do you make me tell you? Cheapen myself to you by telling you—why do I tell you? That I seem now not to belong to myself—if you could know what it was to me to look down on the shell of you, and know the man himself far off from me—"

"Very far off from you," he said soberly. "Worlds and worlds and worlds away from you—away from all human things. So far that I asked if the darkness were death. Beyond any point you have ever reached in stepping out from the dimensions I know. Beyond all that is."

"So near death! And I—my folly made it."

"You will give it up?" He put eagerness into the question. "Give up this forbidden knowledge—forget it? Be just a woman?"

She shook her head. "No. How could I? Dark Lagny's daughter—how could I? I would be two, not one, and one of the two should be—I would have said all for you, but you have no need of that one, I know. And I must go along the path I have entered, but—"

"Yes?" He spoke the question after waiting a long time.

"But if—if at some future time—" she turned as she sat and looked full into his eyes—"you will never lose me, now. Not that you have any need of me, but I—you will never lose me. When I can walk freely in that other state, I shall come to you at times, to find whether you have any need of me. *Any* need of me! The me that you held and in holding wakened—I am fully woman, now. The me that could take hold on the ends of a distance for you and give you sight you could not get apart from me. I see a hundred ways in which I might be of use to you—or, perhaps, mean to you something other than use. Not now—when I have come to my full power. Because then I shall be able to see into your mind, not need to wait for your words."

"Power," he said sombrely. "And again and always—power!"

"No! Something else. Something greater than power."

She leaned toward him, and he knew the scent of her night-black hair, reached out to draw her nearer—and then she sat erect as a knocking sounded on the outer door of the house. Gees stood up.

"Who else is here in the house?" he asked.

She shook her head. "Nobody. After Ephraim and his boy have gone, I am alone here. Why? Why do you ask?"

"All right," he answered, and relaxed from tension. "You said that nobody else comes into this room. I was thinking of you—for you. I—shall I stay here while you see who it is?"

She nodded, and, rising, looked up at him. Abruptly he drew her close and kissed her, all of a lover's kiss. Felt her shuddering response, and the insistent, almost fierce clasp of her arms—she was all woman for that moment. The knocking sounded again, a more imperative rapping on the panel of the door.

"I shall come back to you," she whispered, and left him. And, looking at his wrist watch, he saw that it was ten minutes past eight. Firth would have had dinner alone—it was too late to go to him now.

IRA WARENN went along the hallway and opened the door. Little light came out from the doorway of the room in which she had left Gees, and she could see only the indistinct shape of a man facing her from the step. And, since she had left the door of the green and crimson room open, all the colloquy was audible to Gees as he waited.

"Excuse me, miss—it's Hanson, from the Hall. To ask if Mr. Naylor has been here—if you've seen anything of him."

"I have not," she answered evenly. "I should think this is the last place he would visit, after to-day, surely."

"P'raps it is, miss—I don't know about that. It was Mr. Firth asked me to come and ask you, half an hour or so ago."

"And why—what is all this about?" she demanded coldly.

"Well, you see, miss—" the chauffeur-groom sounded apologetic over it—"after—after Mr. Naylor had that sorter seizure to-day, an' Miss Kilmain took him into the post-office—Mr. Firth was looking after that girl from Todd's place at the time. When he'd got her fixed up and taken her across—this is what he told me, miss—he went to the post-office to see if he could do anything for Mr. Naylor. An' he found Mr. Naylor laid out senseless—he said Mr. Naylor was sick like a man is after concussion, an' then just laid out dead to the world, so Mr. Firth left him like that. Then I come lookin', down from the Hall, because Mr. Naylor's horse come back without him. An' Mr. Firth told me Mr. Naylor'd most likely be all right soon, and then he'd either walk back up to the Hall, or else if he wasn't fit Mr. Firth'd let me know, and I'd come down with the car to take the master back. You see how it was, miss, me waiting for him to come back?"

"Yes," she answered. "Go on—what happened?"

"I came down with the car just before it began to get dark, miss, and when I went to the post-office Miss Kilmain said Mr. Naylor'd come around about a half-hour before, and went out seeming sorter strange in himself—like as if he was still a bit dazed. So I thought

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he'd gone home to the Hall, and drove back up there. But he wasn't there, hadn't been there, and I thought how Miss Kilmain said he looked when he went out from her place, and what Mr. Firth said about concussion, and drove back down to Mr. Firth's place. And he told me he'd seen Mr. Naylor walkin' up this way, just before I'd got to the post-office with the car, and reckoned it wasn't his business. An' then Mr. Naylor didn't come back an' didn't come back, so I turned the car out again and come along here to ask you, because there was nowhere else this way he *could* go, unless he went all the way out to the main road."

"I have not seen him, and know nothing about him," she said.

"Well, thank you very much, miss."

He turned away, and she closed the door on him. Presently sounded the whirr of a starting car, the hum of its low gear, and then all sound ceased. Ira faced Gees, back beside the divan.

"Are you quite, quite sure you are yourself again?" she asked. "Quite sure I haven't harmed you with my—my experiment?"

"Quite sure—Ira," he answered and smiled at her. "But this—I heard all that man had to say—this business of Naylor."

"His business, not mine," she answered. "I have played on him to some purpose, it seems. He is very near the end, now."

"You claim—well, authorship, for this?" he asked.

She nodded assent. "I foretold the deaths of the dog, and the woman, and the child," she said. "Foresaw, and made him think I caused them all. Planted fear in him—fear of me. It has been enough. He *knows* the baresark tendency will develop in him—it is enough. He himself has developed it by fear—I have not. Do you see?"

"Mere auto-suggestion," he remarked. "Yes. But how did you fore-know those three deaths? That was not auto-suggestion."

"No. It is part of the knowledge that is on the Rod. A commonplace fortune-teller—if genuine—has some small fragment of that knowledge. Is able to see—it is not foretelling at all, but realising that there is no such thing as time. Perhaps you can understand that a little better than you could before you came here to me."

"Thanks to you, I can," he said soberly. "Even the fortune-teller gets a little way outside—has a vague consciousness of the ways you know. Yet not a consciousness at all. Is actuated unconsciously."

"You are a very wise man." She smiled as she said it.

"I am not, but—"

He ceased speaking, and listened. She too stood tensed. From somewhere outside the house came a sound that was between a shriek and a roar. She said "Adolphus!" and started toward the door. Gees followed her, out from the room and to the back door of the house.

She opened the door, and a flaring light rayed toward them, a reddish glow from the blazing straw with which Adolphus' pen, placed well away from any other building, was littered. The piles of it in which the boar burrowed for warmth, normally, were masses of red blaze, and the maddened animal, squealing and roaring in terror, raced round and round the pen, by his movement fanning and accentuating the flame. Ira called to him—"Dolph! Dolph!" in agony of entreaty and fear, and ran toward the sty, Gees following, but knowing that neither he nor she could do anything in time. And, as she neared the pen, Adolphus charged with the fury of maddened despair, and smashed down the stout wooden railings on the side farthest from the house. Gees saw him by the light of the burning straw, his hide hairless and half-roasted, and then he had plunged away into the darkness.

Ira called, "Dolph! Dolph— Oh, come back! Dolph?"

But it was useless. Man is the only animal that can comprehend and use fire—to all others, even the bravest and strongest of them, it is a thing of terror, a cause for madness. The boar plunged away downhill, toward the only thing he knew that would hide him from this hell—the pond at which the farm animals drank—water. They heard the splash as he went in, and a choking, gurgling noise that stilled. Again there was nothing about them but silence, for the straw had burned down to a still glow. And Ira called "Dolph? Dolph?"

GEES went down toward the pond, and now she followed him. He struck a match, and saw the boar floating, senseless or dead, out of his reach. He would have waded in, but she held him back.

"No," she said. "He's dead—I could see when you struck the third match. Shock—it isn't the burns that kill, ever, but the shock. Dolph is dead—I know it. Come away. Leave him."

He stayed to strike another match, and hold it high over his head. The night was still, deathly still with a light haze clouding the air, and the match and its reflection on the water showed the boar floating, still and hairless and pink from his burning—dead!

Ira said, "Let us go back. My father chose him out and began his training. Does it sound silly to say I counted a pig among my friends?"

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"I once made a friend of a dog," Gees said. "Adolphus was more than any dog, from what I saw of him."

"Dead!" She took his arm and leaned against him. "Where do they go? Shall I see him again? Dolph! Loyal Dolph! Oh—" Abruptly she flung her arms round Gees and broke into a passion of sobbing. "I have so little—so very little—I who have all the world to play with! Do you know? I—hold me for a little while! Let me grieve for him! I—I—" She forced herself back to self-control. "You see me silly. Tell me—it was only a pig! My—pig!"

"A living thing that looked up to you," he said gravely. "Not silly, Ira—no real affection can ever be silly, whether you spend it on a doll or a child or a pig—it is all one thing. You love."

She drew back from his hold, and turned toward the house. "I am beginning to understand," she said. "Yes. Because I love."

They came to the opened back door, and she looked along the passage, which cut straight through the house to the front. She said, "But I closed that door!" and stood looking along the hallway. Gees too looked, and saw that the front door stood opened wide.

He said, "Naylor!" and almost leaped into the hallway, leaving her behind. In long strides he reached the doorway of the room into which she had shown him when he first entered this house, and, opening the door went in. Utter darkness, but he struck another match and held it up. The oaken chest lay front downward, and its carven lid was smashed and splintered, and soiled by the trampling of muddied feet. He heard Ira in the doorway and extinguished the match.

"Don't come in," he said. "Nobody here—don't come in!"

As he turned toward the door he heard her footsteps recede, and then she returned, bearing the lighted lamp from the other room. She stood holding it while she looked down at the broken chest, and then put the lamp down on the table. Gees lifted the chest over on to its base, and heard the clank of metal. He saw the shimmer of the sword blade, and the rolled parchments, but of the axe with the scribed haft of narwhal horn there was no trace. Beside him Ira looked down.

"He thought I was alone here," she said, very calmly and quietly. "He lighted the fire over Adolphus to draw me out from the house, and then came in to get the Rod. While we were out there he took it—"

She broke off and stood with her head bent toward the chest, listening. Gees listened too, and heard the first faint beginnings of the sword's singing. A noise like trumpets far off, very far off, as it might have been a little echo of the noise of trumpets. Swelling, broadening and gaining in power, as if an army marched hither from the far confines of the world. Until it was a song, a terrible song of power and hate and strong purpose, a melody to drive men mad. A clangour that grew to its ultimate limit, as if the marching army went by, and faded down and down and down until again it was no more than the faintest of echoes, dying away to nothingness.

Gees looked at the girl, and she stood smiling at the rifled chest.

"I know it now," she said. "I don't fear it any more. It is not for me, the doom in that song, but for him. The end is to Dark Lagny, to me. To us Volsungs and children of the Hammer. The sword has spoken, and the last of Oger's race goes down the way of death."

"And the Rod?" Gees asked practically. "You set such value on it."

"All that is written on it I know. The value I set on it was that *he* should not have it, while he was still able to profit by the knowledge written on it. He has stolen it too late—nothing that is on it is of use to him, because doom marches on him, now."

Gees asked, "How do you know?"

"The sword has sung for the last time—it will not have a voice again, because I have read that song." She took up the lamp. "Let us go back to the other room. I know, I tell you. To you, perhaps, all this is foolishness, but I am Dark Lagny's daughter."

He followed her, and she put the lamp down on the ebony table near the head end of the divan—on the other, the bowl which contained the herbs of incense stood, and with it the two glasses. Gees stood irresolute, and she turned to smile at him.

"Two words of yours, when I grieved over Adolphus," she said. "Do you know, already that is a long while ago? Something of the past?"

"Yes, I think I do know," he answered.

"My little pig! I have Peter left—my cat. Nothing else."

"No? And what were those two words of mine?"

"You said 'You love.' I have no fear, no shame in telling you that is true of me. Because of it, I would even let Jerome Naylor go free of me and of any more harm, so much am I softened by it—but it is too late for that. I might even—"

"What?" he asked, after waiting for the end of the sentence.

"No—not that. I will follow this path of mine, find my way along the direction you will not know—do not wish to know. And be

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all I see I may be, far greater than any other living, greater even than the Adepts. Equal with the Powers outside and beyond space—"

"That's near on blasphemy," he interrupted harshly.

"Come to you as and when I will, perhaps unseen and unfelt by you, but *there!*" she went on, as if he had not spoken. "Because—I have no shame nor fear, I tell you—because, unloved by you, I love. If—"

"If?" he echoed, at the end of another long pause.

"Once more put your arms around me, and kiss me—one moment of all you have to live. That I may tell you—not in words."

He held her, and she was a flame in his hold, an infinity of passion-swept tenderness. There needed no words to end that "If"—and then she thrust him away.

"Now go," she said. "You know. When I in my turn can look into your eyes and say as you said—'You love,' I will not ask for power. Because the greater good will be mine. Now go—no more words. Go."

He went out to the night, and back toward Troyarbour and the inn.

CHAPTER VII

THE HAMMER OF THOR

THE haze of earlier evening had thickened to a chill, clammy reek as Gees went down toward the inn. Not so opaque as to be worth terming fog, but a vapoury swirl that, with moonrise at hand, whitened the slopes on either side of the lane. In it he saw ahead of him a wavering, bobbing point of light which, as he neared it, revealed itself as a hurricane lamp. The one who carried it stopped and held it high, standing in the middle of the lane, and Gees also stopped, feeling that he was undergoing inspection. He made out Phil Hodden's fringe of whisker behind the light, and said, "Good evening."

Hodden asked, "Yu zeed un, zur?" with no preface of greeting.

"Seen nobody," Gees answered, rather shortly. "Who is it you want to see?" Though, as he asked the question, he knew.

"Zquire, zur. Gorn all fulish, they zay, an' we be lookin' f'r en!"

"Precious little chance you've got of finding him, till daylight comes again," Gees told the man. "He'll probably go back to the Hall of his own accord, if you leave him alone."

He realised, almost as he spoke, that he had said too much, betrayed knowledge of Naylor's aberration. Hodden lowered the lamp.

"Whut du yu know, zur?" he asked, rather ominously.

"That I've seen nothing of your squire," Gees snapped in reply. "You tell me he's gone foolish, and you're looking for him. That's what I know. What else could I know about him?"

"I—I dunno, zur." Hodden sounded apologetic, now. "But yu been along heer, so I reckoned p'raps—niver moind, though."

He would have passed on, but Gees stopped him by getting directly in front of him. "What did you reckon?" he demanded sharply.

"I—him an' her—Miss Wren—I heerd all what happened to-daay—hur owd boar killed his dawg, an' if so be he wur like what he wor then, when he swore at Miss Wren—mad, like—" Hodden floundered over his explanation, badly—"an' yu been to hur plaace—I reckoned happen he went theer too, an' yu zeed en."

"I have not seen him since he tried to ride Miss Warenn down this morning, and the woman Kilmain picked him up and took him away," Gees said, quite truthfully. "What's more, I'm not looking for him—don't want to see him. You do as you like—good-night."

He stood aside, and as Hodden passed him with a rather sullen "Good-night, zur," went on his way toward the inn. So far as sight or hearing had told, Naylor was nowhere along the lane between Wren's farm and this point, and Hodden would be out of luck if he went on searching in that direction. Naylor had got the Rod, and had not stopped short of arson to get it. He wanted no more than that from Ira.

Words she had spoken came back to Gees as he went on his way. "No shame nor fear. . . . Unloved by you, I love." That she should have spoken them, words that a normal woman would never have spoken, was comprehensible. All her knowledge of life was empiric—she was not to be judged by normal standards. Apart from the time for which her father had sent her away, she had dreamed here in a solitude, rather than lived, and while she dreamed had come on a knowledge which rendered her conscious of herself as a power. She had seen this thing she had found as an acquisition that set her above all others. Here at the first beginnings of the path she meant to tread, she saw herself so far advanced along the path as to be able to command, to ask and have. Inadvertently, in that "experiment" with him, she had wakened herself to full womanhood, and in consciousness of her power in other directions saw no difference between confession of that awakening and statement of her intent to make herself equal with powers beyond three-dimensional comprehension. Seeing herself as greater than all others, should she not command

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all others? Not yet did she realise that what she knew as a greater good than power is not to be commanded, but is wayward as the winds, given and taken away as the gods will.

HE SAID, "You can't have both, Ira," and opened the bar-room door to enter. Past nine o'clock, and the table at which the worthies usually sat was bare and unused, tonight. Up by the bar stood a stocky being in dark box-cloth semi-uniform and gaiters, whom Gees guessed was Hanson the groom-chauffeur, and Firth. They ceased talking and turned to look at Gees as he advanced, and Firth shook his head.

"I waited for you till a quarter to eight," he said.

"Sorry," Gees answered contritely. "I—well, I simply couldn't make it. You said you'd leave it open, in case I couldn't."

"Quite so—that's all right," Firth told him. "And—you've heard that Mr. Naylor has vanished into thin air, I expect."

"Has he?" Remembering his encounter with Hodden, Gees achieved an air of surprise. "Since when? You don't mean—" He broke off, leaving an inference that Firth might have meant anything.

"Since this afternoon," Firth told him. "He was in a sort of coma when I last saw him—that was on Martha Kilmain's bed at the post-office—and after looking him over I decided he would stay like that for some hours. I saw it as the result of his seizure—you remember?"

Gees nodded. "Epileptic, perhaps," he suggested.

"Not it!" The denial was emphatic. "He's never shown any tendency in that direction. No. The symptoms appeared much more like those of concussion, to me."

"Except that he did nothing this morning to get himself concussed, as far as I could see," Gees remarked. "One pint, please, Todd."

"That is so," Firth agreed, as the landlord took out a glass tankard and went to the barrel to fill it. "Martha Kilmain says he seemed dazed when he got up and went out—along the lane toward Wren's farm, or past Wren's toward the main road. We simply don't know where he went. About a dozen men have turned out to look for him."

"I went to Wren's and saw Miss Warenn," Hanson put in, "but she told me he hadn't been there. Said, too, that he wasn't likely to go there, and there's no harm in saying we all know that's quite true."

"I don't see your dozen men finding him, except by luck," Gees observed. "An army might hide on these downs, to say nothing of one man. Especially in such a haze as there is to-night."

"I diagnose amnesia," Firth said. "And you're right, of course—it will be luck and nothing else if he's found. Quite probably he will turn toward the Hall automatically, and be at home by the time you get back, Hanson. If you want me, you know where to find me—it's getting late, and I think I'll get away home, now. I can do nothing here."

"Thank ye very much for what ye've done, Mr. Firth," Todd remarked. "Heer, I mean, for Phyllis. I took a look at her a while back, an' she's sleepin' quite comfortable. I'm much obliged to ye."

"She'll be none the worse in a few days' time," Firth said. "Fortunately, the hound broke no bones—that boar of Miss Warenn's was on him and took him off her in time. Wonderful animal, that—wonderful the way Miss Warenn has with animals, too. How she stopped the horse by looking at it, and—" He broke off and glanced at Hanson, rather trepidantly. Gees knew he had been about to say that Ira had stopped Naylor, too, but had thought better of it.

"Have one on me before you go," Gees offered in the pause.

"No, thank you—I'll get along. Good-night, all."

He went out and, a minute or so later, Hanson took up his drink and finished it, bade good-night to Gees and Todd, and went his way. Todd came and leaned on the bar, rather apprehensively.

"I dunno about cookin' f'r you, sir," he said. "Y'see, Phyllis mostly does the cookin', an' I made a rare owd mess o' them chops."

"There will be some cold ham, and some pickles, and cheese," Gees suggested. "And what more could the heart of man yearn to absorb? In a minute. You're a furriner—I'm a furriner. What are they all saying, Todd? What's the general verdict on the situation?"

"You mean the frackass when the hound got mashed—glory be, what a mess that boar made o' that hound's head!" Todd responded. "Ground it up like I'd chew a bit o' toast! A savage pig is a terrible thing."

"Is that what they're saying?" Gees asked, rather caustically.

"It ain't, sir. I don't quite like what they're sayin', neither. Miss Wren's a pleasant young lady, f'r all I know of her—she's been right civil to me, the few times I've spoke to her. An' the nicest-lookin' lady betwixt heer an' Portland Bill, as the sayin' goes. Y'see what I mean, sir. Take one look at them eyes o' hers, an' you know she's *straight,* let alone anyone bad couldn't do what she'll do wi' animals. They know, do animals, an' it take

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a straight one to handle 'em the way she can. As f'r tales—well, to hell wi' tales!"

"Such as?" Gees asked interestedly.

"Such as—but that warn't what I started to tell you, sir, nor what you was askin' me. She's like that, but that there Ephraim Knapper an' his boy, an' Tom Skinner the shepherd, an' Jerry Flint—live over t'other side o' Timms, Jerry do, so he don't often come in here. Them four is all what makes a livin' outer Wren's farm. Y'see what I'm tryin' to tell you, sir? Them an' Miss Wren herself—no more."

"It's coming to me," Gees answered. "Carry on."

"WELL, sir, heer's Troyarbour, by the grace o' God an' Squire Naylor," Todd said. "So far's we know, he ain't got no relations—an' if he do have any, we don't know 'em. If anything happened to him—this is *their* way o' lookin' at it, not mine, sir—if anything happened to him, what'd become o' Troyarbour? He spent money like water on keepin' up the Hall, an' all the village live on him—'ceptin' of them four I named. An' there ain't one of 'em don't know there's war betwixt him an' Miss Wren. They've kept quiet about it, an' not took sides, so long as everything was all right—they reckoned he'd find some way to drive her out.

"But then she cursed him, the day her father died, an' his lady an' the child up an' died—both of 'em! Troyarbour says to itself—them two don't matter, so long as nothin' don't happen to him, it says. Our livin's safe, an' we're on a soft time, so long as *he's* theer up at the Hall, an' we ain't frettin' about she. But to-day was different. She faced him an' brought him down, an' I don't know if you know, sir, how old feelin' is kep' alive in out o' the way places like this? Lonely places, away from cinemas an' buses?"

"I can guess—all you're getting at," Gees told him. "Go on."

"We're furriners, sir, both on us, so I can talk to you about it. They're sayin', because she beat him down to-day—there's no sayin' she didn't beat him down, because she *did!*—they're sayin' she's got powers past the ord'nary—sayin' she's a witch, like there useter be years ago. Sayin' if she's let run on like this, she'll make that curse o' hers come true on him, an' then the Hall'll be shet up an' all the land he been farmin' 'll go back to sheep feed—an' wheer'll they all be f'r their comforts an' their livin's? I don't say they'll *do* anything, sir—duck her or any o' them old things they useter do to witches, but I don't like the look o' things. Not at all I don't."

"They're in a dangerous mood, you think?"

"Not all, but some," Todd answered. "That theer Fred Carphin—his Nettie got a soft job up theer at the Hall—theer's them which says 'tis more'n a soft job, but I dunno about that. Sam Thatcher—an' what Sam says is took up by most. Timms, wi' the farm next hers—he got a grudge about some grazin' ground which he say oughter go wi' his land, not hers, an' if her lease could be broke it'd go to him.

"I could name ye dozens, all countin' their livin' outer the Hall an' dead against her, an' if they don't find Squire Naylor to-night, an' git outer hand—ignorance can be mighty cruel, sir, an' we're a long way from police an' law, heer. I dunno. It might be all wind an' bluster, as the sayin' goes. It might. I dunno."

"I will have ham, and pickled onions, and cheese, and the newest loaf there is, and lots of butter," Gees said softly. "After that, Todd—this is for your ear alone, you being a furriner like myself—after that, I'm going to take a walk as far as Wren's farm, and heaven help anyone who wants to keep his living if he comes along there to preserve it! Collect the feast, Todd, and I'll go along to the coffee room. And—while I think of it—give my love to your little lady when she wakes up, and tell her she has all my good wishes for a quick recovery. Now get along—food, and I'll love thee to the death, as Tennyson said. Then I'm off—strictly between ourselves."

"Lord love you for a good 'un, sir. I'd hate anything to happen to Miss Warenn. An', come Christmas, sir, we're goin' to get married, Phyllis an' me. Because she's the best little girl betwixt here an' Portland Bill, as the sayin' goes, an'—an' I've found it out."

Gees said, "Half a dozen pairs of the best stockings at five and eleven—I'll have to work it out. Half a dozen, anyway, Todd. Leave it to me—and if you don't turn that ham out one time, there'll be nothing of you to leave anything to anybody! You can consider yourself warned."

But Todd dwelt too far from a main road to appreciate the slogan. He went out of the bar as if Naylor's hound were still alive and close behind him, and Gees, lifting the flap for himself, followed at a more leisurely rate of travel. He knew he would be in time to greet the ham.

* * *

The moon, westerning, lighted the haze of luminance, and Gees, looking up, noted the flattened side of the orb and reflected that, once it had passed the full, it took on an aged look, like a man who has passed his vigour and is no more beloved of women. A sort of illustration of the fact that Time is the untiring foe—was it because he himself was grow-

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ing past vigour that Ira Warenn had failed to stir him to response? Yet he was young, as life goes, and . . . no, it was not that, but the purpose which she put before human love and human tenderness.

She wanted him for a purpose, not for himself. She wanted to make him one with her in that purpose—though she had wakened to consciousness of love, she still relegated it to a secondary place, sought power over him and to make him one with her in the pursuit of power. If he let her, she would use him, learn through him—

Curious beings, women. Giving as it pleased them to give—and no more. Utterly unselfish when unselfishness was selfish—because it pleased them to be so—but never beyond that point. A woman could realise a man's hunger for her, find pleasure in it and hold him, hungering, while she pursued her own aims—and yet love as Ira Warenn was learning to love.

A whispering noise on the night stayed his thoughts. The moonlight half revealed a group in the shadows beside the bank that edged the lane, and he stiffened to rigidity, listening.

"Yu gotter hev light. Yu caan't du it i' the dark."

"The pond's theer. Yu'd see if she floated, sure-ly."

Fred Carphin, that second speaker—and the purpose of the speech was plain. A third voice said—"Whaat du we du, then?" and on that Gees moved forward, faced a dozen or so of men, of whom each one carried a hurricane lamp—but the lights of all the lamps had been extinguished. There was light enough to reveal the faces of those who carried them, and among them all that of old Sam Thatcher stood out vindictive in expression, stubbornly sullen, resentful of this furriner's interference, and obviously defiant of him.

Gees said, quietly, "You men had better go home."

Thatcher said, "An' whu be yu to tell us?"

Gees walked up to him. "If you were ten or twenty years younger, you old fool, I'd tell you quite a lot," he said. "As it is, I'd hate to waken the lady you're planning to injure by making a row. Go home!"

"Me tu, mister?" Fred Carphin stepped forward and sneered at him.

He reached out and took the man by his two ears, and with one large foot swept the clumsy feet from their hold on the ground. Carphin went down with a thud and lay still, staring up as if he wondered what had struck him. Gees looked over the rest, and, without raising his voice, asked, "Anyone else? I'm all ready. Or will you go home, the lot of you, and stop this blasted foolery?"

"You'm sweering," Sam Thatcher reproved him coldly. "Yu got no call to sweer at we. We're duin' yu no harm, mister."

Fred Carphin got up, slowly. He said, "Yu just about broke my back, mister, sure-ly. Why'd yu du thaat?"

"Go home, the damned lot of you!" Gees said with soft fierceness. "Home or to the devil—go!"

They slunk past him in silence, and he counted them—eleven men to one. When they had gone, he took up Fred Carphin's lamp that had been left behind through forgetfulness, and felt it over, to ascertain that it was quite cold: they had wanted no lights for this errand.

He swung about at a faint sound, and faced Ira Warenn.

The sound of receding footsteps going along the lane had died out, but from the distance came the slight murmur of the men's voices.

She said, "Why didn't you let them? It would have been so funny. I wanted them to come in and try to take hold of me—and find there wasn't any me! Take just the one step I can take, and laugh at them."

"And make them still more bitter against you," he said sombrely. "I've been hearing—that's why I came to guard you—"

He broke off, gazing at her. Still in the green frock, which was grey in the moonlight—and the scribed stone on her breast was faintly luminous, a phosphorescent blue. He said, "You fool! You very lovely fool! You are lovely, Ira, and you're a child playing with the lightning. Thinking to use it to scare flies off a wall—why won't you get a sense of proportion into that head of yours—that very lovely head with the hair you stole out of Proserpine's garden? Do you know, the sight of you makes me go all poetic? If I had the brains, I'd sing odes to you, but that other side of you wants to roll up the world and play with it—and so you spoil yourself."

"For you?" She moved quite close to him and spoke softly, caressingly. "Do you mean I spoil myself for you?"

"It's night, Ira," he told her gravely. "I'd have you say no more than you would say in daylight. If—if ever this illusion turned to reality, I'd want you to be able to say in daylight all you think in the night. You're cold—" He saw her shiver. "Go back home, and feel yourself quite safe. They will not come back."

"I—I am not afraid of them," she answered. "*You* are cold. Not as I am. I wish I were cold, not ignorant and silly. I want to be taught the language you speak, to know as you know."

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He took her by the arm. "Home," he said practically. "Warmth and sleep—they're what you need. This fire of you will burn you out, child—you're too intense, wanting to crowd all life into an hour, all the time. Those secrets you learned are eating you up—"

"If you knew them—I want you to know them!" she interrupted.

"Yes, I know you do." He impelled her toward the house. "But I'm not perilling my life as I know it by asking all you ask of the gods. It isn't safe—you'll find that out if you keep on this way you've begun. Not safe, I tell you! And you've achieved your purpose, by the look of things. A night out with this cold clamminess will probably put an end to Naylor, and leave you gloating."

"That is not all." She moved along, his hand still holding her arm, to the doorway of the house. "You know it is not all, but only a prelude—I have to accomplish that, and then I am free to use all the knowledge I have gained. Secrets you cannot even guess—"

"Nor wish to guess," he interposed. "I refuse to play with lightning, refuse to go beyond normality. You have shown me enough."

She stopped and faced him. "It will soon be dawn," she said. "Will you come in with me for a little while? I think—all that the night must know is not yet done, and there is nobody but you I could ask to see the end of it with me. Will you come in?"

HE STOPPED before the open door of the house, and saw the light ray out from the doorway of the green and crimson room. "Why?" he asked. "Why should I? It's very near on dawn, now."

"But—please!" Her eyes reinforced the request.

He followed her into the room he had begun to know, and moved toward the divan. She said, "No—don't sit there. I want you to see the picture. And to find out—with you to see."

"More of your magic?" he asked, gibingly.

"There is no such thing as magic—you know it," she said gravely. "Not—not in the material world. In the world of the spirit—yes. You wakened a magic in me—but that is another thing, quite different, and of no interest to you, I know."

"Do you know it?" He smiled as he asked it, but she shook her head and pointed at the bowl on the little ebony table.

"Will you light it—the stuff in the bowl?" she asked. "Drop a lighted match? As—as Jerome Naylor dropped a lighted match and robbed me of a friend. I want to see—the picture will tell, if you light what is in the bowl. Whether—please light it for me."

"Why haven't you lighted it yourself?" he asked curiously as, taking out his cigarette lighter, he flicked it and dipped the flame into the bowl, holding it down to the powdered herbs.

"It would not be the same," she answered. "Some day, I will tell you why. But now—yes, it is alight. Stand back, here!"

He moved back beside her, reflecting that this was the second thing she had promised to tell him some day—she meant to hold close to him, then. So far his reflections went, and then all thought of abstract futures ceased as a cloud of greenish-blue smoke went up and broke against the ceiling, hiding the wall on which the picture hung, and billowing downward to thin and cease to be, so that it did not quite impinge on him or on the girl who stood quite beside him. So they two stood, and the smoke thinned and thinned, until presently he saw the picture again, two boats moored against a quay—yet were *both* boats moored, as he had thought when he first saw the picture?

He felt a crinkling of his spine as he watched, and heard the girl breathing audibly, almost pantingly. He saw the boat with the crimson sail move, and the sail swayed as if in a wind. There was nobody visible in the boat, but of its own balance or yielding to wind and tide it swayed, or seemed to sway, and moved, swung about, and pointed first out from the picture—then, still swinging, out from the harbourage toward the greying blueness of the farthest horizon.

As if it had been a reality the pictured boat moved, and moved, gathering speed and growing smaller, smaller, till the crimson sail was but a patch against the blue, a swaying, tossing patch that diminished and was now no more than a speck, with the boat beneath it invisible.

"Surely, this is the last fantasy!" Gees breathed.

"Nothing is real—nothing unreal. All things are, and yet are not. Look again!" For he had turned his head to look at her. "A painted picture—nothing more. Look again."

He looked, and saw the picture—one green-sailed boat against the line of quay. Still, a painted thing, flat against the flatness of blue sky that hazed to grey on the horizon. He said again, "This is the last fantasy. Oh, witch, how do you do these things?"

"I do not do them. They are. Now do you know why I asked you to come in with me?"

He shook his head, and gave her no other answer. The last faint curl of smoke rose up from the red bowl on the ebony table, and left only a fluff of white, dead ash. Ira went to the window and swung back the shutter. The greyness outside had lightened—it was

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Past all worlds and suns, past the outermost nebulae of space. . . .

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now very near on dawn. She turned back and faced Gees.

"These are mysteries to you, because you will not go with me and understand them fully," she said deliberately. "That—the passing of the crimson sail—it was a prefiguring. I know what must happen, and it is very near. The last fantasy, you said, but what must happen—what I know will happen is beyond fantasy. Will you come out with me? I think the time is very near—Jerome Naylor's end."

He followed her out from the room, along the passage, and into the chill of dawn's first beginning. The moon had set, but the white haze of night was growing whiter by reflection from the as yet unrisen sun. And there was in the haze a cold like the chill of death, as if spirits from the underworld had risen up to still the blood of men. A harsh, unnatural chill that was of itself a fantasy, as it might have been a breath from the ultimate coldness of sunless space.

THE white reek thinned, but the cold remained, as Gees followed the girl beyond the end of the house to sight of Adolphus' burnt-out pen, the farm buildings apart from the sight of the fire, and, growing distinct in the increasing light, the slope beyond, up which he had walked with her to the long mound of the three thorns. She waited for him to draw level with her, and took his arm. He saw the fine white line of her throat above the collar of the green frock, and her hair, a rippling darkness, uncovered.

"It's bitterly cold," he said. "Let me go back and get you a coat or something." And halted, faced toward the height they had climbed.

"No. This frock is warm—I'm not cold. Why do you think for me like this? Why did you come through the night to me as you did?"

"Because it seemed the obvious thing to do," he answered. "I had an idea—and those men confirmed it. You'd told me you were alone here—I couldn't let you face anything of that sort alone."

"I have been alone a long time—until you came," she said. "I shall be alone again till I learn how to come to you—to master the greater distances in place of groping and stumbling over small steps."

"Leave it alone, Ira," he urged gently. "I have seen enough to know—leave it alone, before you are destroyed."

She shook her head. "Nothing is ever destroyed," she said. "There is change, but no death. You—you will go back to what you see as your sane world, and all this you have known in a little hollow of the hills will be to you no more than the shadow of a dream. You will say you dreamed it, and none of it was real, because it is all outside your sane world. When you see me again—"

"Is it 'when' or 'if'?" he asked in the pause.

"Are you still afraid of me?" She asked the question abruptly instead of answering his.

"Of you the woman—no," he answered. "Of the witch—yes."

"And if there were no witch?" She turned her head to look at him as she asked it, and her eyes smiled.

He shook his head. "You won't give it up," he said, "won't be content with what you call my sane world. You'll always want to slip out along that fourth perpendicular, play with the stars and feel yourself something more than human—though you're not. It's like a drug to you, a temptation too strong for you. A wrong thing you won't give up until it has —destroyed you. Because it *is* wrong, and you know it."

"Yes, I know it. And I will not give it up."

"Child, you're cold! I'm cold too." He put his arm round her and held her close to him. "Why are we out here in this—this human iciness? What do you expect of it? Come back to your room."

"No." She pointed up at the long mound on the hilltop. "There—it will all end there—all that began with Sigurd's dying. Soon, very soon. And this cold—I cannot escape it, no matter where I go. It is a Presence, a very old Power. Soon—now!"

The last word was an exclamation, and again she pointed toward the height. Then Gees saw how a smallish figure climbed the slope, from some starting point between them and the village. A lonely little figure that went slowly, wearily upward to the mound.

"It is Jerome Naylor," she said. "Last of Oger's breed."

"We ought to stop him," he said. "The man is mad—quite mad. He must have been wandering about all night—he'll kill himself."

"He is too far off—we could not stop him," she dissented. "And he will not kill himself. He has the Rod in his hand, and while he holds it he will try to kill others, not himself."

Then Gees remembered how he, holding the axe-haft in his grasp, had felt the influence of the weapon, had consciousness that it had killed many men. He said, "You mean it makes him mad."

"Baresark," she answered, "and that is a madness, as you know."

He had a moment's mind-picture of Naylor on the horse, riding-crop lifted as he tried to drive the horse at her, and the murderous blaze in the man's eyes. It was in truth a madness.

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"You brought it on him," he said accusingly.

"He brought it on himself," she contradicted. "Believed it would be, and so made it. That is his fate—watch, and see."

Holding her, he felt the cold about them lessen, and become no more than the rawness of dawn in a day of late autumn. The figure she had said was Naylor had reached the summit of the ridge, and now climbed the steepness of the mound. Gees said, "We ought to go up, make him come down and act like a normal man. This is—"

"In that state, and with the axe in his hand, he would kill us both," she interrupted. "A baresark man has the strength of five—you could do nothing, while he holds the axe. And—look!"

NAYLOR gained the top of the mound, coming out to distinctness against the lightened sky at the end on which, she had said, women had been stretched between the trees in old time. At the other, men's end of the crest, there grew a shape that was not a shape, a gigantic shadow like a djinn cohering from smoke to substance. It shrank to human semblance, became shaped, and was the figure of a helmed giant—Gees saw shadowy horns projecting from the helm, such as the Norse warriors of old time wore, and saw that the shape held a vast hammer in its left hand. And it was all shadow, a mere illusion against the sky that reddened for the imminent sunrise, something with no more substance than a cloud.

Gees asked, "Am I mad, too?" and he blinked to dispel this aberration of his sight. Uselessly: the shape was there.

Ira said "We are children of the Hammer, Sigurd's children, and now the Hammer will destroy the Rod. Jerome Naylor has seen it—look!"

He looked again at her bidding, and shadowy Thor bulked against the skyline, so illusory that the redness of the dawn was scarcely darkened by his shape, so nearly real that he dominated the height like a crown on the brows of morning. He swung the vast Hammer lightly in his left hand, and his right hand beckoned the puny human with the Rod.

The gesture was a taunt—Jerome Naylor saw it, and ran along the summit of the mound, with the axe uplifted in acceptance of the challenge. Then again, though to himself and not in words, Gees questioned if he were mad, for that other madman could see the shape. And Ira could see it, but she was mad in a different way, one in which she thought to step beyond limitations and be one with the gods who interweave and yet are separate beyond the three dimensions that man knows.

While Naylor ran, Gees knew past all doubting that hers was a madness which would bring her to doom. Knew it as, up to that moment, he had not known, and tightened his hold on her as if he would hold her back from the path she meant to follow. He said "Turn back, Ira!" but she shook her head and pointed toward the height.

There Naylor faced the shape of Thor, and the great, shadowy Hammer that was now upraised, poised like a reed in the great Smith's left hand, and ever interposed between the shadow and the axe which the baresark madman tried to strike. Again and again he tried to reach past the guard of the Hammer, of which the heavy head flicked with rapier swiftness, and Thor stood rock-like with head thrown back and face upraised to the sky, as if it were nothing to him to guard against so slight an attack as this.

As he stood thus he sang, and again and for the last time Gees heard the song the sword had sung, but now it was a tiny echo that beat back and down from the day-veiled stars, a shadow of a song as the singer was no more than a shadow of a shape, yet it was strong and terrible, and while he listened Gees knew that the old gods do not die, for there is no death, only change. They pass to other place and other use, but they do not die.

For a moment Gees looked away from the summit of the mound, his gaze diverted by movement lower down, and saw men running up the slope of the down. He counted five of them, men of the village who had seen Naylor waving the axe in his madness, and went to save him—so they thought—from himself. Gees saw them, and then looked again at the warring man and shadow silhouetted against the reddening dawn.

The axe was wearying, moving more slowly, and Thor's song was fiercer and more terrible. The vast Hammer that he wielded as if it had been a feather went up above his back-thrown head, came down like a lightning-flash on the scribed handle of the axe—and, as Naylor fell and lay still, the terrible song ceased. The shadow that was Thor turned its back on the fallen man, and went striding into the sunrise, a deeper red on the redness of the sky that blended in with the fierce colouring, and presently ceased to be.

The running men were near the top of the ridge, now. Ira shivered and held herself close to Gees, nestling for warmth. She said, "I am very cold. You see—I have not harmed him. All this was fated, foreknown and fore-

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doomed before I was—before Sigurd begot Dark Lagny. I am very cold—let us go back. Else, if I went up there, they might say I had struck him down—I in my strength against him in his weakness. Come back with me for a little while—a little while!"

He felt her shuddering with cold, and leaning more heavily on him as they went back. Along the chill corridor, and into the green and crimson room—he saw again the picture in which only the one sail rose over the quayside, and a fluff of white ash in the red lacquer bowl. Had the smoke from the bowl bleached out that other sail, made the illusion of the boat's passing out from the picture? Yet he had *seen* the boat loosen from its mooring, swing about, and pass away.

Ira said, "Hold me—not for love, but for warmth. I am so cold, and you are warm, solid and warm. Close—hold me!"

So holding her, he saw faint colour come back into her face, and her lips that had been pale with the cold reddened again. He felt her arms tighten their hold on him, and her eyes looked into his before they closed as she yielded up her lips to his kiss. Yet in yielding challenged, asked, and gave—the very spirit of her, he knew.

"I am all woman, for you. Wakened, by you. No witch, to you. No longer my own, but part of you. Ask, and I give—to you."

HE SAID "Give it all up, then, Ira. Be content as you are. This is the greater good—you know it now. And you may tell me what I told you. There is no woman like you, if you will be just woman and turn back from all the rest. Ira?"

She whispered, "I may say—you love?"

"Know it—" again he found her lips and held them—"you!"

"I will come to you—no! If I give it all up, you must come to me! Can I? I told it—can I let go?"

She drew back from him and stood, perplexed between the aim that had been hers so long and this new urge that the first man to hold her wakened. He knew that she saw beyond the hour, into the future in which the old knowledge would tempt her: he could sense the struggle in her mind, yet her next words came as a shock—

"For this, Dark Lagny hung on a cross outside Eboracum."

"So!" he said heavily. "Choose. This is all fantasy, but in it I love you, Ira. Choose you, the dark ways outside time and space that will bring you to an end, or . . . magic. They say Dark Lagny had many lovers. I would have you take on, and hold to . . . me."

A heavy knocking on the outer door of the house startled her to realisation of practical things. Leaving him with no word of explanation, she went out, and he heard her voice at the end of the passage.

"Good morning, Ephraim. The boar's sty caught fire last night, and he was so badly burned that he rushed into the pond and died there. I want you to get the body out and bury it—yes, at the far end of the apple orchard. Please. Before you do anything else. Then come back to me, and I'll give you your orders for the day."

"Aye, miss. But if he'm only burnt, the meat'll be good."

"Bury him, I tell you!" The order was fiercely harsh.

"Aye, miss. Yu says, an' I'll du it."

She came back into the room, changed, mistress of herself. For a minute or less she looked into Gees' eyes, and her own eyes softened.

"I must have time," she said. "You ask me to forego so much. The patient search that has lasted years, the gain I have had of it, the sight of greater gain very near my hold, now that I had finished with Jerome Naylor. All this, and against it—?"

She made a question of the last sentence. Gees, chilled, shook his head. He knew, even then, which way her choice would fall.

"Against it, magic," he said. "The only magic there is, Ira. For me, to look at you and say—'I love.' Till you have made your choice, I will not say it again. Nor may you."

"Do you know how much we have lived through since last night?" she asked after a pause. "Adolphus dead, the Rod gone, Naylor beaten down as we saw, and this new wakening, greater than all the rest. I think even I am tired and need time to rest. And you?"

He knew he was tired, then—up to that moment he had not realised how great had been the strain of the night and its happenings—and of the last stupendous, fantastic, incredible happening in the light of dawn. He said, heavily—"I too. Yes. I shall see you again before I go, Ira. Be able to think clearly again—see you—"

With no further word he went out. As he went, he heard the clanking of pails—Ephraim's boy was going to his milking, Gees divined. A small, inconsequent thing—was anything in life other than small and inconsequent? One might live through what seemed great moments, but the small things of life went on all the time, inexorable, inconsequent, unescapable. Ham and eggs at The Three Thorns, a bed on which to sleep and sleep, to wake, perhaps, to sanity and normal things, other than this unreal, fantasy in which old gods swung hammers. . . .

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It was a long, long way to the inn. When he got inside, he said, "I want some ham and eggs, Todd—lots of ham and lots of eggs. Don't cook 'em yet—I want a sleep, first. If you wake me before I've slept it out, I'll murder you. When I've had it, ham and eggs."

"Right you are, sir. Nuthin' went wrong?"

"Exactly that—nothing. Because I know now that nothing exists, but everything isn't. Do you know your Shakespeare, Todd?"

"Not too well, sir. Wrote plays, didn't he? I learned bits at school, an' that sorter stopped me frettin' about him. When you get them things, an' parse an' analyse 'em, they go sour on you."

"Quite so, but he wrote one great truth that I've had rubbed in since I came to Troyarbour. 'We are such stuff as dreams are made of.' You get that? You're a dream—I'm a dream—all we do and say and think is nothing but a dream, dreamed by—what?"

"'Fraid that's way over me, sir. An' if that brewer's man don't turn up with a load before noon, you'll get no bitter to-night, because you got to give a cask time to settle arter the finin's is put in. I hope he's somethin' more solid'n a dream."

"I will now stagger up to—dream," Gees said. "Ham and eggs when I wake, but not till. Let me sleep it out, if—"

Without ending the sentence, he went toward the stairs' foot. As he went, he questioned whether sleep were for him, in spite of his weariness. But, lying down fully clothed as he was, he passed to dreamlessness almost instantly. Ira, warm and pulsing in his hold, was a moment's recollection, and then she passed—all things passed.

* * *

At some point in the day he wakened enough to take off his shoes and, rousing more fully with the movement, stripped off all he was wearing and got between the sheets naked as a bathed infant, the way he liked best to sleep. He did not look at the time, and so did not know if it were still morning or past noon, and, snuggling down between the warming sheets, went off again, to waken in darkness. Then he lighted the candle beside the bed and, seeing that it was past six o'clock, got out, yearned for the bath that the inn could not provide, and after a simple wash went down, to find Todd hovering.

"I was in two minds about comin' up to wake ye, sir," Todd informed him. "I reckoned you'd slep' it out long since, an' must be bad."

"I am bad. Which reminds me—how is the little lady?"

"She's pickin' up surprisin', sir. An'—I hope it's all right wi' you, sir, but I told her you called her that, an' she near on cried wi' pleasure. You know what women are, sir, I expect."

"I don't, you don't, and nobody ever will," Gees told him. "The eternal puzzle. Well, you tell the little lady she's all that and then some, and I'm glad she's getting better. And this little matter of ham and eggs—what about letting me do the cooking?"

"Oh, no, sir! I got Cowder's wife in to look arter Phyllis—I can't keep an eye on her *an'* the bar, openin' time. An' Mrs. Crowder's got the eggs all laid out riddy, an' the ham cut, f'r me to say the word. An' seein' you was up all night an' slep' all day—"

"How many eggs, Todd? The truth, and nothing but!"

"She got six laid out, sir. I reckoned—"

"Don't! You simply can't reckon. Tell her to divide by two."

CHAPTER VIII

THE SHATTERED ROD

"SUCH stuff as dreams are made of." The miracle that Shakespeare was, the clothing he could put on common things, making eternal verities of his clowns, even! Sam Thatcher, and Jacob Cowder, seated at their nightly table with their cronies, had been in the knowledge of that world-genius, were figured as chorus in his work, for all time. They, too, were such stuff as dreams were made of—stuff for *his* dreams, fixed for ever in his prose of comic relief from the poetry of his greater genius. Here in the bar room of The Three Horns sat Bardolph and Nym, the two Dromios, Lance and Speed, the same in essence to-day as when the world-genius portrayed them. So Gees reflected as, entering the bar-room, he saw the worthies—but only for a minute, to-night.

For, acting in concert with Sam Thatcher, one and all of them lifted their glass mugs, finished their half-pints and, rising from their seats, stumped solemnly to the door, and out. Firth, up by the bar, stared at the closed door as Gees advanced to join them.

"What's bitten them all?" he asked, more of Todd than of Gees.

"A slight disagreement I had with them this morning, I think," Gees answered him before Todd could speak. "With them and a few others. I dunno, Todd—if my coming in here is going to rob you of custom like that, I'd better take my pint back to the coffee room and stop there."

"Not you, sir!" Todd protested emphatically. "I make more outer you bein' here

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than I do outer what that lot'll spend in a week. They takin' one night off ain't goin' to hurt me. You just stop where you like. A pint you said, was it, sir?"

"One—as a beginning," Gees assented.

"Make it the end as well, and come across and eat with me," Firth suggested. "Atone for your previous dereliction."

"I'm sorry, but I've just stoked ham and eggs to the limit," Gees answered. "My first meal to-day, and I made it a big one."

"Too bad!" Firth shook his head. "To-morrow night?"

"If I'm still here—it's very good of you to persist like this. But I doubt whether I shall be here—probably leaving in the morning."

"You'll stay for the inquest, I suppose?"

Gees achieved an expression of surprise. "Inquest?" he asked.

"Squire Naylor," Firth explained. "It'll be almost formal, apart from my evidence—I was the only qualified medical man anywhere near. Last night—first thing this morning, rather. They didn't find him, and he appears to have wandered about all night and climbed to the top of the downs this morning—before sunrise. Mad as a hatter—must have been, by what the men who saw him say."

"How—what makes them think that?" Gees asked.

"He'd nothing more than a thin indoor suit on—and out in the cold all night, never going near the Hall, as far as can be told. In the very first of the morning he climbed up to that height overlooking the village, and he'd taken some sort of old battleaxe—he's got trophies by the dozen up at the Hall, and I expect he took this one down some time or other, and picked it up again after he left the post-office yesterday. That's the only way to account for it—nobody else has any African or Eastern stuff of that sort round here, as nearly as I know. Anyhow, he got to the top of that long mound, and there, they say, he did a sort of war-dance or something, waving the thing about while half a dozen of them climbed up in the hope of catching him and getting him back home and to bed. But they didn't."

"No?" Gees asked, and knew that, even if those men of the village had seen the shade with the Hammer against which Naylor had fought, they would not have believed their own eyes.

"No," Firth said. "Before any of them could get near him, he slipped and fell—they couldn't see exactly what happened, because of the slope, but I went up there to-day, and it looks to me as if he skidded on the grass—it's very slippery, as I found, myself—and fell so that the old battleaxe, or whatever it is, struck him just over the solar plexus. Either the head or the shaft end—it doesn't matter which it was, and there's no telling, now. But the way I see it, he fell on to the thing with one end on the ground and the other striking against his breast, because the bone is driven in, and the bone handle of the axe is literally shattered to powder. By what I can see of the bit left in the axe-head, that shaft was very old and brittle, and it simply crumbled when his weight came on it."

"I see-e," Gees commented thoughtfully, and remembered how—if he could believe his own eyes—the Hammer had shattered the Rod. Had that happened, or had Naylor fallen as Firth deduced, splintering the ancient bone or horn by the sudden impact of his weight on the end?

"That, as I see it, finished him—he was stone dead when the men got up there. Shock following on complete exhaustion. I'd like to dissect the brain, to see if there's any possibility of getting at the cause of his seizure—but of course I shall not be allowed to do it.

"It seems to me that the mania, whatever it was, held him to physical exertion up to the limit of his strength till the very last moment. That happens in a good many forms of mental derangement, you know. The subject maintains a frenzy until he or she collapses. Then coma—in his case, completely exhausted as he was, death. He'd no stamina—there's nothing of him but skin and bone."

"A tragedy for the village," Gees remarked, remembering what Todd had told him. "That is, unless someone takes over."

"As nearly as I can make out, he hadn't a single living relative," Firth said. "That, I suppose, is a unique case, or very near it. Unless he made a will, it looks as if the Crown will benefit. But I must get along. Don't forget to-morrow night, if you're still here."

"I'll remember," Gees promised, and knew as he spoke that the promise was an empty one, for he would be back in London before to-morrow ended. This fruitless "case" was at an end, as far as he was concerned. Ira would go her way. . . .

He brooded over it, alone there with Todd, and almost unconscious, for the time, of the man's presence. She was wonderful, like no other woman he had known, and he had been near on loving her in those last minutes. Very near, until she chilled him with the reference to Dark Lagny's end. And she would not give up her quest for forbidden things, but would go her way. Suddenly Naylor's words recurred to his mind—

"Her ways are death."

He had been right. But—death to her too?

"You'll have another, sir—with me?"

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"Make it a half, then, Todd, just to drink your health. And I shall be leaving in the morning."

"Hope you'll come this way again, sir, before long."

"Ah!" Gees made the syllable non-committal, and took up the refilled glass. "Here's happiness to you and the little lady."

"Thankye, sir. An' all the best to you, wherever you go."

CARS parked before the inn, uniformed police in evidence, a sober, black-coated individual who, Gees decided, was Naylor's man of law, and another who was probably the coroner. Villagers turning out in their Sunday best for the occasion—Gees backed his car out of the shed in mid-morning, unchallenged by any one of them, and turned it to drive along the lane.

Halfway between the village and Wren's farm he swerved into a gateway and stopped. It appeared the nearest point to the mound on which Naylor had died, and Gees wanted to see that height again before he left Troyarbour —not to return, he told himself. He felt that he wanted never to see the place again.

He climbed, steadily, and reached the top of the ridge. Climbed again, coming up to the women's end of the crest where three thorns had once stood, and walking the length of the mound till he came to where Naylor had fallen. He knew it must have been at that spot, because of the whitish fragments of the axe-haft scattered among the dry, slippery grass. Tiny fragments, and even a whitish powder which proved that the haft had been as brittle as a stick of chalk.

He had thought, as he climbed, that it might be possible to collect the splinters and reconstruct enough of the Rod to read its runes, but one glance at the rubbly whiteness scattered there told him that it was out of the question. Dark Lagny's knowledge was no longer to be read—unless those parchments in the chest held it. If so, Ira would guard them. . . .

He saw her as the thought came to him, saw her appear at the women's end of the crest and come toward him. Her hair was uncovered—he had not seen it otherwise—and she wore the green frock and pendant with the scribed stone. Her eyes were sombre as she faced him.

"I saw you," she said, "and thought you might go—"

As he would have gone, without attempting to see her again.

The incomplete sentence told him she had known that as his intent.

"I am going," he answered. "But that is not to say I should have passed your place without stopping to say good-bye."

"No?" She gazed at him steadily. "But I knew."

He gave her no answer. At last she turned her head to look down toward the farm. "And so—I climbed the hill," she said.

"Was it necessary to climb?" He put a satiric tinge into the query.

"Yes," she answered simply. "I would not come to you here in that other way. I think now I shall never come to you, never see you again."

"Because you will persist—" he suggested, and left it incomplete.

She shook her head. "I do not know," she said slowly. "It seems now—now that Jerome Naylor is dead—all the purpose of my life is ended. Infinity is cold—*I* am cold! It is a mood, and perhaps it will pass. As you . . . pass."

Again he was near on love for her, and knew it. She was like no other—not in a whole lifetime would a man weary of the deep music of her voice, nor learn all that her eyes could teach. He said, "Ira, if you would be all human, not—not—" and did not end it.

"I know. Do you know, I believe at one and the same time that I shall come to you, and that I shall not see you again? That to me is a mystery, but so it seems to me now. That I shall come to you—"

"Using that power you are learning?" he asked in the pause.

"Or, perhaps, as I have come to you here," she answered. "I do not know—it is all dark. And that I shall not see you. It is all dark, and I cannot see how these two things can be."

"Nor I," he said thoughtfully. "They are—incompatible, call it."

"When you have gone out from this place, and in thought look back, it will appear to you that none of these things happened—that you dreamed them," she said slowly. "Dreamed me—perhaps that is so, and you are dreaming now. Or perhaps I dream—you! But to me some moments in the dream are real. The first kiss of a lover—so you kissed me. Standing with you to see how Jerome Naylor was struck down by the Hammer. Holding you, taking you out from Time to Sight, when you so nearly went past Fear, but drew back, not knowing how small is that step. For that moment, in the place beyond moments, you were one with me, and I hold it here"—she laid her hand for a second over her heart—"as real. I tell you this because I shall not see you again."

"Yet, you say, you will come to me," he reminded her.

"Yet I shall surely come to you. Because you

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came to me here and wakened another self in me, taught me—what have you not taught me? The world of the spirit in which the flesh must have part, consciousness that only when both are given full play is completeness possible, and that I may gain most only by giving most—if you have need of me. Now go—do not answer—go! Alone. Until I come to you."

He knew why she imposed silence on him, and went stumblingly down the side of the mound, to look up before he began the easier descent of the hillside, and see her standing, gazing down at him. Then he went on, down to the car, and drove past the farm, along the tortuous windings of the lane, out to the main road which meant normality.

When he saw Blandford and the smooth rise of road beyond it, he began to question—how much of what he remembered, how much of what he had experienced there at Troyarbour, had been real? It had the quality of a dream already. Ira, wonder-woman in those last moments—

"I may gain most only by giving most—if you have need of me."

In that, he knew, she had voiced the completion of her womanhood—she understood what few women ever learn. *Was* she real, or a dream-figure in a fantasy he had dreamed? Had there ever been a Squire Naylor—did Troyarbour exist? Was *anything* real?

". . . such stuff as dreams are made of. . . ."

A state that cut across this world, a state in which were Presences beyond human comprehension—and she, Ira, sought to comprehend them! A state in which time and space were not, into which she could move by taking one step. A step of the spirit? He had not seen that she made any physical movement.

Incredible, all of it. Preposterous! But she was very lovely, and if, some day, she should come to him and bring with her the knowledge that only by giving most might she gain most—

He heard the hum of his tires on the three-dimensional, tarred metalling of the road. He was going back to London, to his office, to more inquiries out of which cases might arise, to Miss Brandon. Out from a dream. . . .

"AH, THANK you, Miss Brandon." Gees took the clipped sheets of typescript that the girl held out to him, and nodded at the very comfortable chair which stood at the end of his desk, a trap in which to imprison possible clients. "Do you mind sitting down and talking this over with me? You digested that report as well as typed it, I hope?"

"Naturally," she answered, with an ironic inflection. "If you wish to bounce your ideas, the wall is here."

She seated herself in the chair—or rather, sank down into it—as she spoke, and Gees resumed his swivel chair at the desk.

"I dictated it as fully and descriptively as I could," he said, "with a view to clarifying my own views—getting some sort of explanation. And find none. How does it strike you?"

"All capable of explanation," she answered. "Rational explanation if one—well, accepts certain postulates."

"As how?" he asked interestedly.

"What do you want explained?" she asked in reply.

"She—Ira Warenn, that is, because there is only one woman in this story—she vanished and reappeared in my sight, by means of her use of the fourth perpendicular. That is to say, she actually moved in the fourth dimension. That for a start."

Miss Brandon's brows drew together thoughtfully. She said, "Suppose we consider this Ira Warenn herself, as the start?"

"What do you want to consider about her?" he demanded.

"Your reference to her in the report on the case."

"It isn't a case. I didn't do a thing from start to finish, and I made nothing out of it—got bilked of eighteen guineas that I'll never see, now. Practically speaking, we can't regard it as a case. Pass that, though. Let me hear you on Ira Warenn."

"Very lovely, according to you. Also a woman of exceptional abilities, an exceptional woman in every way. Very attractive. May I ask if you are in love with her, Mr. Green?"

"Ask anything you like—I want to bounce my ideas. I'd say in answer to that—I don't know. I couldn't tell you or even tell myself without seeing her again. Until I see her again."

"By the 'until,' you indicate that you are," she said coolly. "Now you have cited that vanishing and reappearance. She didn't."

"Oh, yes, she did!" he derided. "I *saw* it!"

"As I said just now, an exceptional woman in every way. That power over animals proves it—a woman of almost incredible personal magnetism, and therefore one possessed of tremendous hypnotic power. She used that power on you, made you see what did not happen, just as an Eastern conjurer will make you see a plant grow in a pile of dust in the course of a few minutes. It did not ever happen."

"Says you! All right, Miss Brandon, I want your explanations to compare with my own conclusions. The laughter that scared those yokels at the inn? How do you account for it?"

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"Perfectly simple. She was outside, unseen in the darkness."

"She wasn't—it sounded *inside,* not outside at all."

"Ventriloquially. I think, Mr. Green, you rather let your practical self go to sleep over this. You know as well as I do what ventriloquists can do, the illusions they can create—"

"All right—all right, Miss Brandon. And, when, as I told you in that report, she put her arms round me and got me to hold her—not for any emotional reason, as I said—when she took me into that other world where I saw and heard and smelt and felt independently of her—saw things past the farthest edge of human sight, and heard tones beyond the range of a three-dimensional ear—"

"In those first experiments on you," she said as he paused, "she gained a certain hypnotic influence over you. In this, with physical contact to aid her, she completed the influence, and all you saw and heard and all the rest of it was impressed on your brain by hers. She is, as I said, a woman of exceptional abilities. Tremendous abilities, I might call them. But all within three-dimensional limits."

"Umm-humm! The practical mind—yes. The song of the sword?"

"You didn't hear it. She made you believe you did."

"The shape on the hill; with the Hammer?"

"Your doctor Firth gave you the rational explanation of what happened there. Apparently none of the men who tried to get to Naylor in time saw anything unusual—only you and Ira Warenn saw it. That is to say, by her hypnotic influence she created the picture in your mind, willed you to see it. And the axe-handle—naturally, if a strip of bone is preserved for ten or more centuries, it will crumble at the slightest blow. Just as the axe-handle crumbled."

"I've seen Belgae skéletons dug out at Mai-Dun, near on eighteen centuries old, and you could have used the leg-bones for walking sticks. They wouldn't crumble," he objected acidly.

"Dug-up bones—yes," she said. "They had been hermetically kept from the action of the air and changing temperatures, not subjected to them—as this axe-handle was subjected, apparently."

"Then you deny Ira Warenn's use of a fourth dimension?" he questioned, after a pause for thought.

"Time is the fourth dimension," she retorted coolly.

"Is it? Well, I grant you that. But this fourth—not fifth—into which she can move, simply abolishes time. In it, there is no such thing as time—as I saw it. In it, time and space do not exist. You don't move from one place to another in a fraction of a second, because there are no seconds. You *are* here—you *are* there—and neither 'here' nor 'there' exists. In infinity, you don't move at all, because you are part of infinity, which is beyond space. Where there is no space, there can be no movement. Do you see?"

"I see that you're merely accepting the hypnotic trance she thrust upon you, Mr. Green. You'll be telling me next that she took you from this world into eternity, and you somehow managed to get back."

"My dear girl—"

"I am not your dear girl!" she interrupted.

"All right—all *right!* Let me get on with it. I was going to say—you are in eternity here and now. The reason you don't see yourself so is that you are bound by time, dragged along by time, handcuffed to the illusion we know as time. There is the value of this fourth perpendicular, as soon as man is spiritually fit to comprehend and use it. In his present state of development, he'd merely tuck a big gun under each arm and sail out along the fourth perpendicular to slaughter his fellow man, or else go out invisibly and spread false reports to rig the stock markets and so make his pile by ruining the said fellow man. But to get back to what I was saying, the main value I can see in the use of this fourth perpendicular is that of absolute freedom from time, erasure of it from among the dimensions we know."

SHE shook her head. "That's too deep for me," she said. "You must grow old, surely? Humanity can't be eternal."

"But it *can,* once it's released from time," he insisted. "I took in half a lifetime of impressions, of new knowledge, in the timeless instant I spent in that state with her, and Fear alone barred me out from experiencing the other half. I was no older for it, or no more than a second older, when I saw her standing apart from me instead of holding me as at the beginning of the experiment."

"Still I say it was all hypnotic," she persisted. "That she has unique hypnotic powers, and used them on you."

"And on Naylor, you'd say," he suggested.

"Undoubtedly. She herself told you—according to this report—that auto-suggestion brought him down to—well, to death, in the end."

"I've a good mind to go back there," he said abruptly. "With your solutions for everything fixed in my mind, to see if you're right."

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"To see Ira Warenn again," she amended, slowly and with almost a gibe in her voice. "To fall still more under her influence, and—" She broke off, and smiled, as if the rest needed no words.

"Do you consider me a man, or a child?" he demanded irritably.

"All men are children," she answered, smiling no longer. "Half the troubles of the world arise out of women who refuse to believe it. To hold a man, a woman must give and go on giving, as to a child. What is it I typed in this—her words, as you dictated them? 'Gain most only by giving most.' Oh, she is very wise, this Ira Warenn! Yes, go back to her by all means. You will not regret it, while she realises that as her means of holding—as the only means there is."

"How do you know?" he asked of her curiously.

"Oh—what was your word? Empiric knowledge, say. Yes, empiric. Or perhaps, once, I gave and gave and gave to the uttermost. Gained nothing for myself, but found my reward in the giving. I don't mean—I counted for nothing, and knew it, but the giving was its reward."

"I shall not go back," he said with decision. "It is in your typing—or ought to be—she will go her way."

"Believing it will bring her to you," she commented reflectively. "Yes. I see. She is not as wise as I thought. Withholding, she could not hold. It must be complete—she must not withhold."

"Withhold what?" he asked.

"What have you asked of her? To give up that way she insists on following. And whatever you might ask—" She did not end it.

"You're seeing me as a sort of monument to selfishness," he said.

"You are a man—I meant that to apply to any man, not merely to you. The best of them, as well as the worst."

He thought it over. "We haven't got far with this discussion, have we?" he asked at last, rather caustically.

"Oh, quite a long way!" she dissented. "I've bounced some of my ideas and watched them flatten and expand—I'm intensely grateful to you, Mr. Green. But still I say all your experiences were hypnotically produced illusions, all originated in a three-dimensional mind—one of extraordinary capacities and powers, though."

"Is that so?" he drawled, with a trace of scepticism that, he knew, she always found exasperating. "And for me, all illusion—or delusion. But you haven't explained away everything yet."

"I've given you rational explanation on every point you've brought forward," she retorted with acid triumph. "What else?"

"How did the crimson-sailed boat unmoor itself and go sailing out of that picture? I saw that, clearly enough."

"THERE are two or three explanations." She spoke slowly, thoughtfully. "The most unlikely one is that there never was a crimson-sailed boat in the picture, but Ira Warenn foisted it on your imagination to impress you at the finish with its disappearance. A more likely one is that there are still two boats in the picture, but with her very great powers of hypnotic influence she has blotted one of them out as far as you are concerned. I mean, if I looked at the picture, I should see both boats, but she has rendered you incapable of seeing that one. Was that sail the only crimson in the picture?"

"As nearly as I remember—yes," he answered. "And it isn't a trick picture with clockwork mechanism or anything of that sort. Flat water-colour painting, and a very good piece of work at that. I noticed it particularly the first time I saw the room."

"With that one touch of crimson in it—yes. And she asked you to light some stuff that rose up as smoke and hid the picture from sight for a time. Which gives a third explanation. The smoke had a bleaching effect on the crimson pigment, and on no other colour. It bleached out the sail, and the effect started at the edges, so that you saw the sail grow smaller until it vanished altogether."

"Won't do." He shook his head. "I saw the boat swing about, and actually move toward the horizon. Like a real boat."

"You thought you saw that happen," she dissented. "You didn't."

"*I* see!" The causticism of those two words was almost vitriolic. "Now explain away how the cat got in my car, two miles and more from its home and at a place where they stoned it away if they found it—when I first went to see Naylor, I mean, and before I knew about Ira Warenn—except for what Naylor told me, of course."

She smiled, rather pityingly. "Can you or anyone control a cat, or forecast where it will go or what it will do? That particular cat happened to have wandered so far, and inspected your car. Found a warm leather cushion where you had been sitting, and settled down on it—quite naturally. Your being told that it was stoned away is evidence that it haunted the Hall at times, which accounts for its being there just then. A pure coincidence—and a most important one, as I see it, for when you told her about it you gave her the idea that started the whole

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thing. She managed to convey to you the first impression that enabled her to use hypnotic influence on you later."

"Excellent! All so very logical. Not illusion at all, but delusion. I've not only been led up the garden, but dumped in the ditch at the far end as well. We live and learn, don't we? Now tell me the why of it. She did all this—to what purpose?"

She shook her head. "Only one person can answer that question," she said. "Ask it of Ira Warenn when she comes to you, or—as I believe you will in spite of everything you may say—when you go to her."

He sighed, heavily. "I see. And my ideas won't bounce to-day—you're too beautifully, perfectly logical. Now—" he sat erect in his chair—"I think you've got some inquiries I haven't looked over fully. If you'll fetch them in—but do have a cigarette first, just to show there's no ill-feeling. Yes? Now a light. Good! And I'll come along to your room and go through the inquiries there. I've got an uneasy feeling in spite of all your explanations—"

He did not end the sentence, nor did she appear to expect him to define the feeling. In her room, he seated himself on the corner of her desk, as usual, and began a scrutiny of the letters she handed to him.

"All this—this Troyarbour business, I mean—was a mere waste of my time, from the practical point of view," he said. "Now let's see. Something with money in it—that's what we want, Miss Brandon. Lashin's of money—a real wad of mazuma. Let us be strictly practical."

FOR three days the subject of Troyarbour and all that had—or had not—happened there was completely ignored by Gees and his secretary. She knew quite well that he resented her explanations, and resented his resentment. Perhaps she resented still more the knowledge that Ira Warenn was in his thoughts, and it might be even nearer than mere thoughts: for, as she had told him, she had given and given and given, not only brain, but heart as well—to him, and he could not see it! She was too near him, she told herself; she must contrive some reason, other than that of holiday, of getting away for a fortnight or so. He might miss her, then, and realise all that she did for him. In that way, he might see her as essential to him, or might find that he could do without her. It would be a gamble, but—

Near on three years of almost daily companionship: it was inevitable, his taking her for granted. Also, it must be stopped.

Thus she reflected in mid-morning of that third day, after replacing her telephone receiver. Eventually, sighing, she got up from her seat at the desk and went along to Gees' room at the other end of the short corridor. He sat at his flat-topped desk with the morning's *Times* opened before him, and looked up at her inquiringly.

"Mr. Ferguson will be here to see you at three-thirty," she said.

"Ah! Umm-m! What did you make of him, Miss Brandon? Very Scotch, or just Scotch and soda?"

"The accent was there, but not noticeably," she answered frostily.

"Horace Ferguson," he mused aloud. "Well, since he's calling, we get the two guineas initial consultation fee, anyhow. Also we find out what it's all about. His letter told just as much as J. St. Pol Naylor's, and no more. Did you get a hint of the nature of his trouble on the telephone?"

She shook her head. "He wouldn't tell me, naturally."

A voice sounded to them, faintly, yet so clearly that Miss Brandon heard it as music, such a speaking voice as few women possess.

"I cannot see you. I come to you, but I cannot—"

It seemed to Miss Brandon that the voice did not cease utterance then, but was cut off, as if by the closing of a sound-proof door. She saw Gees start to his feet so suddenly as to send his chair crashing to the floor, and point past her toward the door of the room, and his eyes were wide with fearful expectancy. Then she turned her head, to look along the line that pointing finger of his indicated.

She saw, as he saw, a tress of rippling, lovely, night-black hair, suspended at the height of her own head, close by the wall of the room. A pace or more distant from the wall, still, as if hung by a thread—but there was no thread! Neither then nor at any later time could she tell how long both she and Gees stood in utter immobility, and the hair stood (so she would have expressed it) rather than was suspended there. She knew only that it seemed a very long time.

Then the voice again. In it infinite longing, and the pain of a desire forever denied fulfilment.

"You are there, I know. I come to you, but do not see you—do you remember? There is no return, for me! I shall never—"

Silence again. Miss Brandon started back with a little gasp of fear. For the night-black tress was falling, floating down, until it lay on the carpet. They two waited, still, expectant, but heard only faint noises from the streets outside—except that Miss Brandon

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heard the beating of her own pulse in her ears, a soundless sound.

Gees moved first. He came out from behind the desk, and went slowly toward the place where the hair lay, and, as he went, he held his hands apart and at full stretch before him—Miss Brandon knew what he expected. What he hoped, she felt in her heart. She saw him grope like one in utter darkness, heard him whisper—

"Ira? O, Ira!"

Uselessly. He won no reply, no sign of other presence than his own and Miss Brandon's in the room. He stooped, took up the little scented tress—the scent that was Ira Warenn—and held it against his lips. Then he crushed it in his hold, and looked at Miss Brandon.

"Well?" he asked.

She said, whisperingly, "Not—not illusion. I was wrong."

"She came to me—she did not see me—"

He went back to the desk and sat down, holding the night-black hair, so lately fallen from Ira's head as to seem still alive with her life, in his hand and gazing down at it. He said, "No return. She will never—I know. It was forbidden knowledge that she had, and used. And so They hold her, on the other side of Fear."

"She is—you mean—she is—dead?" she asked fearfully.

He looked up at her and smiled. "There is no death," he answered.

"But—that—her hair—she was *here!*"

"No. Only this—this I hold—won through. The rest of her—she was never in this room, but was held back. You would have to see as she made me see, and then you would understand. Held back, and she knew—told me—'There is no return, for me.' There *is* no return!"

He sat looking at the tress he held. Miss Brandon too looked at it, and asked herself what must the woman be whose hair was like that. All loveliness? Like her voice with its unforgettable cadences?

A sudden anger against Ira Warenn surged in Miss Brandon as she looked at Gees sitting there. The woman had gone her way, thrown away his love because she could not realise that one must give all and go on giving all, though she had known it. In time, barred out past return, she would fade in his consciousness, but she had hurt him, and for that Miss Brandon hated her. Then Gees looked up.

"You must ring the man who was coming in today, Miss Brandon," he said, "and put him off till the day after tomorrow. At the same time, the day atfer to-morrow. Yes. Then get on to the garage—I want the car in an hour from now. Can you sleep here to-night?"

"I—yes, I could," she answered wonderingly.

"Just in case, if—I'd want you to be here and tell her I've gone to Troyarbour to look for her there. To reassure her, ask her to wait. To tell her—maybe she understands, now, and will give up that way of hers because—well, one must give up everything to gain what she came to me to find. So nearly came to me, I mean. Do you understand?"

"Yes, I know. I'll stay here all the time till you get back."

"Good for you! Don't be . . . practical." He smiled, and she knew gravity would have been better to see than a smile like that. "Just be—be very gentle with her, if—"

"I know, Mr. Green. And for you sake I hope—"

He shook his head, smiling no more. "I have no hope," he said. "She told me, there is no return. Still, I shall go. That's all, Miss Brandon. You're a terribly good sport, and I do appreciate it."

When she got back to her own room, she had to wipe her eyes before she could see to dial the telephone number.

A THIN drizzle of rain obscured the crests of the downs and spoiled that day as, in early afternoon, Gees drove along the lane to pull in before the frontage of Wren's farm. Except for the rain, it might have been his first coming to the place. Irene the sow was out in front with her litter, and fowls scratched and chirrawked over bits of grit and whatever else they found as justification for their patient industry. He got out from the car and knocked at the closed door—knocked again, and yet again, waited, and then, giving it up, went around to the back of the house.

A sound took him toward the farm buildings, past the charred desolation that had been Adolphus' pen, and he found Ephraim Knapper, cleaning out the cowshed in readiness, probably, for the evening's milking. Ephraim straightened himself, pushed back his greasy old bowler hat from his forehead, and said, "Arternoon, zur," in a questioning, friendly sort of way.

"Good afternoon," Gees responded. "Miss Warenn—could I see her? I've tried the front door, but couldn't get any answer."

"Happen she be zleepin', zur," Ephraim suggested. "I ain't zeen her go out, an' if she's been goin', she'd towd me, I reckon."

"When did you last see her?" Gees asked.

"It'd be—lemme zee." Ephraim scratched

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his cheek for inspiration. "Aye, nigh on 'leven, it'd be. Zhe coom to back door theer—I wur fetchin' haay—she coom to back door an' stood a bit, an' went baack—dedn't zay northin', jes' went baack. An' shet the door. It wur nigh on 'leven when I zeed her."

It had been eleven o'clock, or a very few minutes after, Gees knew, when he and Miss Brandon had heard the voice—when he had seen the tress of hair that now was locked in the top drawer of his dressing chest at the flat. She had come to him.

"I'm going to see if either door is unlocked, Ephraim," he said, "and if I can get in, I'm going in. You don't know what may have happened to her between eleven o'clock and now, and she doesn't answer my knock. You can come along too, if you feel like it."

"Noa, zur, yu goo—I dooan't wanter goo. Yu knows her, an' yu looked arter her when they coom along that mornin'—" He did not specify the occasion, but Gees knew what he meant.

"All right. You carry on with what you have to do."

He went round to the front of the house again, and tried the door there with no more knocking. Unlocked, it yielded as the handle turned, and he entered the passageway. The doors of both the rooms that he knew stood open, and, standing between them in the hallway, he called softly—

"Ira? Where are you? Ira?"

But knew, as he called, that he would win no reply. After a pause, he entered the dingy room to which she had first taken him.

The chest, with the ruined bits of its lid down in front, stood by the wall. It was empty: the parchments and the sword had gone—charred bits of wood and blackish, leathery-looking fragments in the grate told what had become of the parchments, and he did not look to see what had become of the sword that would sing no more. There was nothing else that he wanted to see in the room, and he crossed the hallway to enter the room of green and crimson, and stand before the divan to look at the picture which, once, had showed two boats moored against a quay, one with crimson sail, and one with green.

Now, *no* boat remained. The line of the quay stretched before a white wall, and back of it were white houses, and the blue of the sky. To the right was the long perspective down which he had seen the crimson sail grow small and smaller, and vanish. Abruptly he turned and went out, remembering something Miss Brandon had said.

He found Ephraim again. "I want you to come into the house," he said. "Want you to look at something with me."

Following him, Ephraim wiped his feet carefully on a tuft of grass outside the front door, and then entered the room where the picture hung.

"A good picture, isn't it?" he asked.

"Aye, zur. Right pritty," Ephraim conceded.

"And those two boats against the quay—at the edge of the water, there—" He reached out a finger to indicate the spot. "They're well done, don't you think?"

"Booats, zur? There bain't no booats!"

"Surely, man! A green sail and a red!"

Ephraim shook his head. "Mister," he said

In The Next Issue

THE WHITE WOLF

By Franklin Gregory

What irresistible, unnameable evil drew Sara Camp-d'Avesnes to a strangely familiar hovel in Philadelphia's reeking slums? And what connection had her odd disappearances with the horror that shocked the Pennsylvania countryside?

Also

THE GREEN SPLOTCHES

By T. S. Stribling

August issue on your newsstand May 21

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severely, "you'm seeing things! Theer bain't no booats, an' theer bain't no zails i' that picter, an"—he turned, suddenly accusing—"yu knows it!"

"All right." Gees produced a half-crown, and handed it over. "I was only fooling. That's all—you can go."

Ephraim stumped his way out, muttering to himself, and for a little while longer Gees remained before the picture. Ira had told him that the passing of the crimson sail had been a prefiguring. Had the green sail followed that same way, over the horizon, out from the picture?

A flurry of movement, and Peter the cat did his great leap to land on Gees' back.

"Peter! Oh, Peter!" Gees said chokingly.

At a thought he went out to the car, the cat still on his shoulders like a necklet that reached only from ear to ear behind him. He turned and looked up at the house, and it was empty, dead. There was no return for her. He had known it when he set out.

He said to himself, "You can't steal a cat. A cat isn't property—you can't steal it."

HE GOT into the car and seated himself at the wheel. Peter climbed down to the seat beside him, looked up at him. He said, "Yes, old chap, if you feel like it. Because she loved you."

He left the car by the kerb and went up the stairs with Peter in his arms. It was then past eight o'clock in the evening, and Miss Brandon came out from his office room, not her own, to stand gazing at him and at the black cat in his arms.

"You won't have to stay the night after all, Miss Brandon," he told her. "I've brought a lodger, a permanency, unless he goes back on me. His name's Peter. Do you like cats? Cherry-coloured cats with rose-coloured weskits, like this one?"

She came forward and stroked Peter's head, very gently. "He's just lovely," she said.

Gees put the cat down on the floor. "I'll get him a basket," he remarked. "One of those round ones that'll just fit him when he folds himself up. And put a fat cushion in it—to-morrow. Oh, Peter!"

Peter looked up at him for a moment, and then went exploring. He went along to Gees' office room, and vanished inside it.

"You remember I told you about the picture?" Gees asked the girl.

She nodded. "And I said—"

"Yes, I know you did," he said, as she did not end it. "I got an ancient man to come in and see it with me—he'd not been hypnotised to see things that weren't there, or miss seeing things that were—"

"Don't, please!" she interrupted.

"All right—I won't. The green sail has gone too, now."

"I don't understand—any of it," she said perplexedly. "What—what will happen there now—at Troyarbour? At her place?"

He shook his head. "I don't know. It is nothing to me. I know, past any question, that I shall not see her again."

She said, "I'm so sorry, Mr. Green. For you." Said it with absolute sincerity, but he made a little impatient gesture.

"Get your hat and coat, girl, and get away home, before I start weeping on your shoulder. These things—the real things—one faces them best alone. And I know now how real this was. Good-night, Miss Brandon."

He passed her, then, going to his own room. Peter, seated on the swivel chair at the desk, looked up at him and emitted a very faint, small, questioning "Waow?"

Peter went to the door, and Gees, following him, heard the latch of the outer door click behind Miss Brandon. Some time, perhaps, he would again think of her as Eve Madeleine, but not now—not tonight. He saw Peter scratch at the door of his room, and opened it. Peter went straight in, and, as Gees switched on the light, he saw the cat standing on his hind legs, clawing at the top drawer of the dressing chest.

Then Gees went to the drawer and, opening it, took out the tress of night-black, wonderful hair. Not quite so wonderful now—*her* life that had been in it no longer made it vibrant in his hold, and when he lifted it to his lips the scent of her as he had known it was faded, almost to nothingness. He said aloud, "Ira? Oh, Ira!"

No voice answered. No voice would ever answer, he knew.

Peter, at his feet, looked up and mewed piteously, persistently. Then Gees turned about, half-blinded for the minute, and stumbled into the other room with the cat running round him, looking up and mewing, calling. Before the fire Gees shook his eyes clear, and for the last time laid the wonderful hair against his lips.

"For you, Peter, this. Lest you should go on remembering and grieving—calling to her. Because she loved you."

Bending forward, he laid the tress among the red coals. It shrivelled to nothingness with a little sound that was like a sigh. It had vanished, gone beyond return.

After a time Gees turned about, and saw that Peter had gone on the seat of the swivel chair again, where he lay as if quite at home, quite content. When Gees scratched his head for him, he looked up and purred. ■ ■ ■

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TO AN AZTEC RELIC

Strange shape, with pointed jaw and bulging eyes,
Is that a fiendish scowl or lurking grin?
Say, thing, are you a God of Paradise,
Or effigy of Aztec Mortal Sin?
Relic of culture ages old!
A famous artist made you, none can doubt,
For you are wrought entire of purest gold—
The work unseen in dirt, all gold without.
When in the Monarch's palace you were set
How filled that heathen artist's heart with pride!
He swore the world would ne'er his work forget,
He called himself immortal—then he died.
For centuries the shifting desert sands
Have piled high above the royal hall
Where you were raised aloft by reverent hands—
A lean coyote howls above the wall.

—PAUL WILSON

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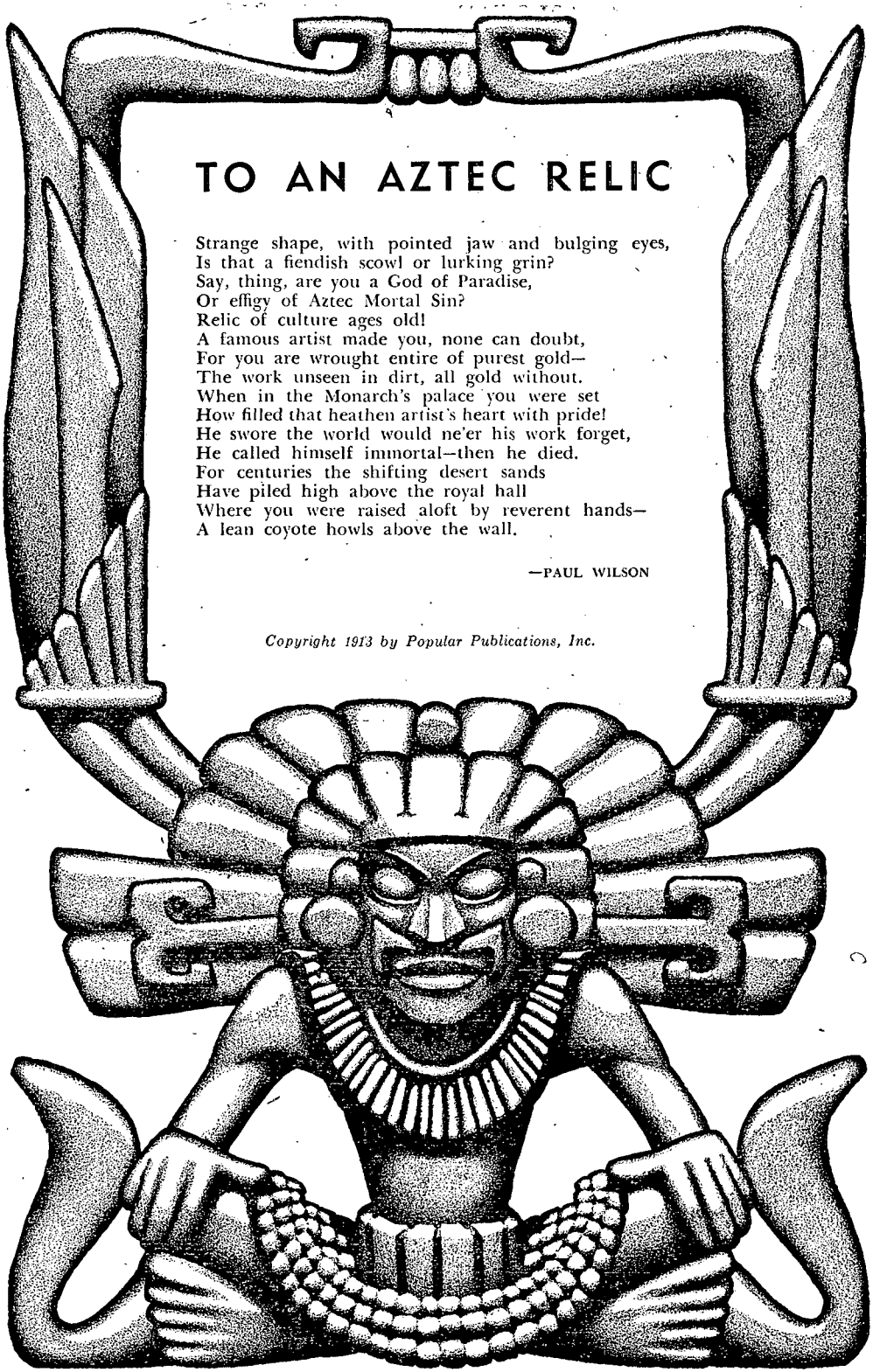

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By Robert Heinlein

GENTLEMEN, BE SEATED

This story takes place on the moon. But its down-to-earth realism is as unaffected as hamburgers and hot-dogs, as timely as today's paper—as human as man's inherited fears.

IT TAKES both agoraphobes and claustrophobes to colonize the Moon. Or make it agoraphiles and claustrophiles, for the men who go out into space had better not have phobias. If anything on a planet, or in a planet, or in the empty reaches around the planets can frighten a man, he should stick to Mother Earth. A man who would make his living away from *terra firma* must let himself be shut up in the cramped quarters of a spaceship, knowing that it may be his coffin, and yet he must be undismayed by the wide-open spaces of space itself. Spacemen—men who *work* in space, pilots and jetmen and astrogators and such—are men who like a few million miles of elbow room.

On the other hand, the Moon colonists need to be the sort who feel cozy burrowing around underground like so many pesky moles.

On my second trip to Luna City I went over to Shapley Observatory both to see the Big Eye and to pick up a story to pay for my vacation. I flashed my Journalists' Guild card, sweet-talked a bit, and ended with the paymaster showing me around. We went out the north tunnel, which was then being bored to the site of the projected coronascope.

It was a dull trip—climb on a scooter, ride down a completely featureless tunnel, climb off and go through an airlock, get on another scooter and do it all over again. Mr. Knowles filled in with sales talk. "This is temporary," he explained. "When we get the second tunnel dug, we'll cross-connect, take out the airlocks, put a northbound slidewalk in this one, a south-bound slidewalk in the other one, and you'll make the trip in less than three minutes. Just like Luna City—or Manhattan."

"Why not take out the airlocks now?" I asked, as we entered another lock—about the seventh. "So far, the pressure is the same on each side of each lock."

Knowles looked at me quizzically. "You wouldn't take advantage of a peculiarity of this planet just to work up a sensational article?"

I was irked. "Look here," I said, "is there something about this project that's not quite kosher?"

"Take it easy, Jack," he said mildly—first use of my first name; I noted it and discounted it. "Everything's kosher. It's just that the Moon's had too much bad publicity lately—publicity it didn't deserve."

I didn't say anything.

"Every engineering job has its hazards," he insisted, "and its advantages, too. Our men don't get malaria and they don't have to watch out for rattlesnakes. I can show you figures that prove it's safer to be a sandhog in the Moon than a file clerk in Des Moines. For example, we rarely have broken bones in the Moon; the gravity is so low—while that Des Moines file clerk takes his life in his hands every time he steps in or out of his bathtub."

"Okay," I butted in, "the place is safe. But

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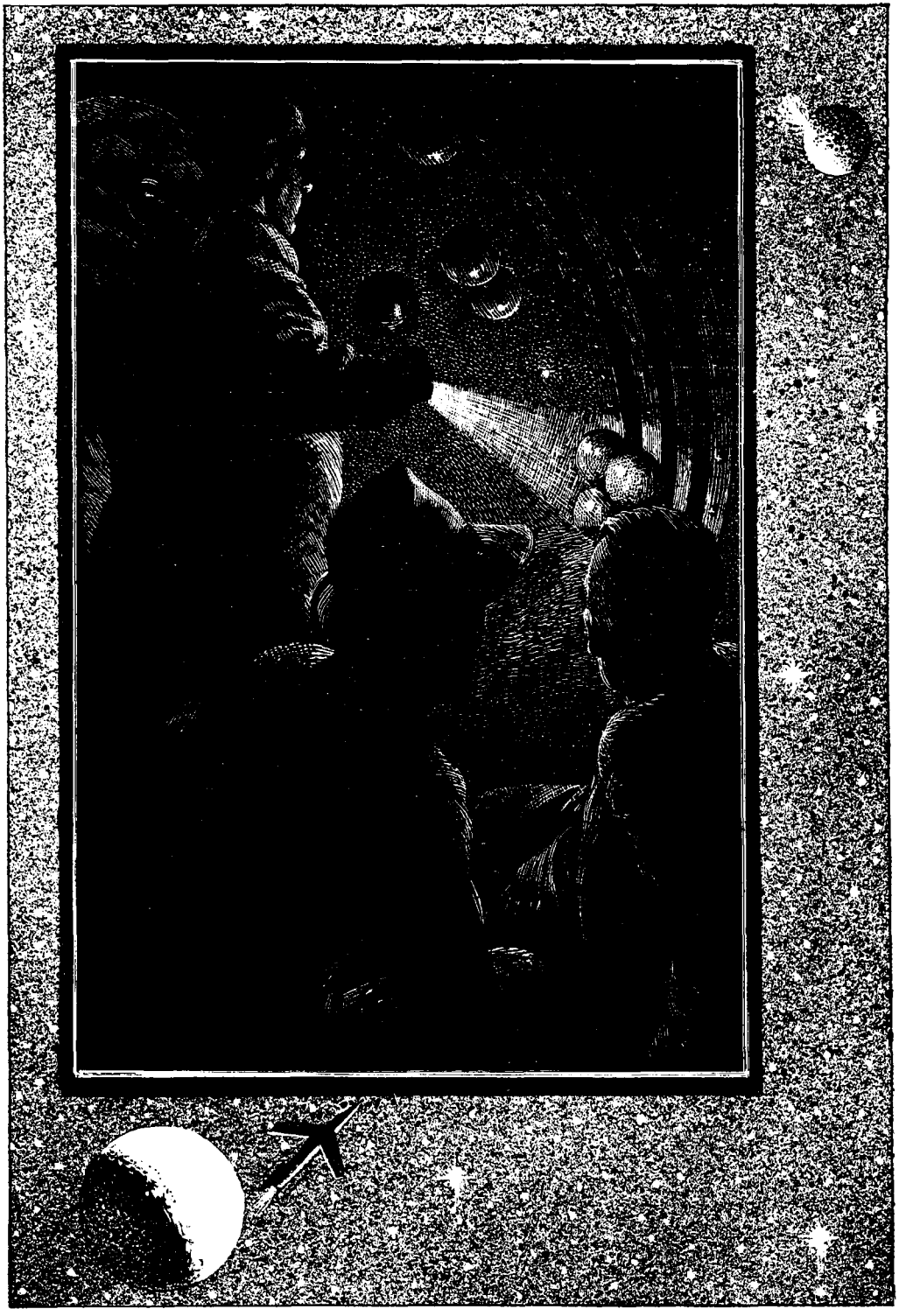

The hole sucked up the burst balloon and began to hiss. . . .

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you keep unnecessary airlocks. Why do you?"

He hesitated before he answered. "Quakes. Earthquakes—moonquakes, I mean." I glanced at the curving walls sliding past and wished *I* were in Des Moines. Nobody wants to be buried alive, but to have it happen in the Moon—why, you wouldn't stand a chance. No matter how quick they got to you, your lungs would rupture. No air.

"They don't happen very often," Knowles went on, "but we have to be prepared."

I NODDED. "These airlocks are to confine your losses, in case of a quake?" I started seeing myself as one of the losses.

"Yes and no. The locks would limit an accident, if there was one—which there won't be. This place is *safe*. Primarily they let us work on a section of the tunnel at no pressure without disturbing the rest of it. More than that, each one is a temporary expansion joint. You can tie a compact structure together and let it ride out a quake, but a thing as long as this tunnel has to give, or it'll spring a leak."

The scooter stopped as Knowles was speaking and we got off just as half a dozen men were coming out of the next airlock. They were wearing spacesuits, or, more properly, pressure suits, for there were hose connections instead of oxygen bottles, and no sun visors. The helmets were thrown back and each man had his head pushed through the opened zipper in the front of his suit, giving him a curiously two-headed look.

Knowles called, "Hey, Konski!"

One of the men turned around. He must have been six feet two, and fat for his size. I guessed him at three hundred pounds, earthside.

"Mr. Knowles," he said happily. "Don't tell me I've gotten a raise."

"You're making too much now, Fatso. Shake hands with Jack Arnold. Jack, this is Fatso Konski, best sandhog in four planets."

"Only four?" inquired Konski. He slid his right arm out of his suit and stuck his bare hand into mine. I said I was glad to meet him and tried to get my hand back before he mangled it.

"Jack wants to see how you seal these tunnels," Knowles went on. "Come along with us."

Konski stared at the overhead. "Well, now that you mention it, Mr. Konwles," he said, "I've just finished my shift."

Knowles said, "Fatso, you're a money grubber and inhospitable as well. Okay—time-and-a-half."

Konski turned and started undogging the airlock.

The tunnel beyond looked much the same as the section we had left except that there were no scooter tracks and the lights were temporary, rigged on extensions. A couple of hundred feet away the tunnel was blocked by a bulkhead with a circular door in it.

The fat man followed my glance. "That's a movable lock," he explained. "No air beyond it. We excavate just ahead of it."

"Can I see where you've been digging?"

"Not without we go back and get you a suit."

I shook my head. There were perhaps a dozen bladderlike objects in the tunnel, the size and shape of toy balloons. They seemed to displace exactly their own weight of air, for they floated without displaying much tendency to rise or settle.

Konski batted one out of his way and answered me before I could ask. "This piece of tunnel was pressurized today. These tag-alongs search out stray leaks. They're sticky inside. They get sucked up against a leak, break, and the goo gets sucked in, freezes, and seals the leak."

"Is that a permanent repair?" I wanted to know.

"Are you kidding? It just shows the follow-up man where to weld."

"Show him a flexible joint," Knowles directed.

"Coming up." We paused halfway down the tunnel and Konski pointed to a ring segment that ran completely around the tubular tunnel. "We put in a flex joint every hundred feet. It's glass cloth, gasketed onto the two steel sections it joins. Gives the tunnel a certain amount of springiness."

"Glass cloth? To make an airtight seal?" I objected.

"The cloth doesn't seal; it's for strength. You got ten layers of cloth, with a silicone grease spread between the layers. It gradually goes bad, from the outside in, but it'll hold five years or more before you have to put on another coat."

I asked Konski how he liked his job, thinking I might get some story. He shrugged. "It's all right. Nothing to it—only one atmosphere of pressure. Now when I was working under the Hudson—"

"And getting paid a tenth what you get here," put in Knowles.

"Mr. Knowles, you grieve me," Konski protested. "It ain't the money; it's the art of the matter. Take Venus. They pay as well on Venus, but a man has to be on his toes. The muck is so loose you have to freeze it. It takes real caisson men to work there. Half of the punks here are just miners; a case of the bends would scare them silly."

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"Tell him why you left Venus, Fatso."

Konski expressed hurt dignity. "Shall we examine the movable shield, gentlemen?" he asked.

We puttered around awhile longer and I was ready to go back. There wasn't much to see, and the more I saw of the place the less I liked it. Konski was about to open the door of the airlock leading back, when something happened.

I was on my hands and knees and the place was pitch dark. Maybe I screamed—I don't know. There was a ringing in my ears. I tried to get up and then stayed where I was.

It was the blackest dark I ever saw. I thought I was blind.

A torchlight beam cut through it, picked me out, and then moved on. "What happened?" I shouted. "Was it a quake?"

"Stop yelling," Konski's voice answered me casually. "That was no quake; it was some sort of explosion. Mr. Knowles, you all right?"

"I guess so." Knowles gasped for breath. "What was it?"

"Dunno. Let's look around a bit." Konski stood up and poked his beam around the tunnel, whistling softly. His light was the sort that had to be pumped; it flickered.

"Looks tight, but I hear— Oh, oh! Sister!" His beam was focused on a part of the flexible joint near the floor. The tag-alongs were gathering at this spot. Three were already there; others were drifting in slowly. As we watched, one of them burst and collapsed in a sticky mass that marked the leak.

The hole sucked up the burst balloon and began to hiss. Another rolled onto the spot, joggled about a bit, then it, too, burst. It took a trifle longer this time for the leak to absorb and swallow the gummy mass.

Konski passed me the light. "Keep pumping it, kid." He shrugged his right arm out of his suit and placed his bare hand over the spot where, at that moment, a third bladder burst.

"How about it, Fats?" Mr. Knowles demanded.

"Can't say. Feels about as big as my thumb. And it sucks like the mischief."

"How could you get a hole like that?"

"Search me. Poked through from the outside, maybe."

"You got the leak checked?"

"I think so. Go back and check the gage. Jack, give him the light."

Knowles trotted back to the airlock. Presently he sang out, "Pressure steady!"

"Can you read the vernier?" Konski called to him.

"Sure. Steady by the vernier."

"How much we lose?"

"Not more than a pound or two. What was the pressure before?"

"Earth-normal."

"Lost a pound and four-tenths, then."

"Not bad. Keep on going, Mr. Knowles. There's a tool kit just beyond the lock in the next section. Bring me back a Number Three patch or bigger."

"Right."

We heard the door open and clang shut, and again we were in total darkness. I must have made some sound, for Konski told me to keep my chin up.

PRESENTLY we heard the door, and the blessed light shone out again.

"Got it?" said Konski.

"No, Fatso. No. . . ." Knowles voice was shaking. "There's no air on the other side. The door wouldn't open."

"Jammed, maybe?"

"No. I checked the manometer. There's no pressure in the next section."

Konski whistled again. "Looks like we'll have to wait till they come for us. In that case. . . . Keep the light on me, Mr. Knowles. Jack, help me out of this suit."

"What are you planning to do?"

"If I can't get a patch, I've got to make one, Mr. Knowles. This suit is the only thing around." I started to help him—a clumsy job, since he had to keep his hand on the leak.

"You can stuff my shirt in the hole," Knowles suggested.

"I'd as soon bail water with a fork. It's got to be the suit; there's nothing else around that'll hold the pressure."

When he was free of the suit, he had me smooth out a portion of the back; then, as he snatched his hand away, I slapped the suit down over the leak. Konski promptly sat on it. "There," he said happily, "we've got it corked. Nothing to do but wait."

"Let me see your hand," Knowles demanded.

"It's nothing much." Knowles examined it, anyway. I looked at it and got a little sick. He had a perfect stigmata on the palm, a bloody, oozing wound. Knowles tied it up with his handkerchief.

"Thank you," Konski said. Then he added, "We've got some time to kill. How about a little pinochle?"

"With your cards?" asked Knowles.

"Why, Mr. Knowles! Well, never mind. It isn't right for paymasters to gamble, anyhow. Speaking of paymasters—you realize this is pressure work now, Mr. Knowles?"

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"For a pound and four-tenths differential?"

"I'm sure the union would take that view—in the circumstances."

"Suppose *I* sit on the leak."

"But the rate applies to the area, helpers included."

"Okay, miser, triple-time it is."

"That's more like your sweet nature. I hope it's a nice long wait."

"How long a wait do you think it will be, Fatso?"

"Well, it shouldn't take them more than an hour, even if they have to come all the way from Shapley."

"H'm-m-m . . . what makes you think they will be looking for us?"

"Huh? Doesn't your office know where you are?"

"I'm afraid not. I told them I wouldn't be back today."

Konski thought about it. "I didn't drop my time card. They'll know I'm still inside."

"Sure they will—tomorrow, when your card doesn't show up at my office."

"There's that lunkhead on the gate. He knows he's got three extra inside."

"Provided he remembered to tell his relief. And provided he wasn't caught in this, too."

"Yes, I guess so," Konski said thoughtfully. "Jack, better quit pumping that light. You just use up more oxygen."

We sat in the darkness quite a long time, speculating as to what had happened. Konski was sure it was an explosion; Knowles said it put him in mind of a time he had seen a freight rocket crash on take-off. When the talk started to die out, Konski told some stories. I tried to tell one, but I was so nervous—*scared*—that I couldn't remember the snapper. I wanted to scream.

After a long silence, Konski said, "Jack, give us the light again. I got something figured out."

"What is it?" Knowles asked.

"If we had a patch, you could put on my suit and go for help."

"There's no oxygen for the suit."

"That's why I nominated you. You're the smallest. There'll be enough air in the suit itself to get you through the next section."

"Well, okay. What are you going to use for a patch?"

"I'm sitting on it."

"Huh?"

"This big, broad, round thing I'm sitting on. I'll take my pants off. If I push one of my hams up against that hole, I'll guarantee you it'll be sealed tight."

"But— No, Fats, it won't do. Look what happened to your hand. You'd hemorrhage through your skin and bleed to death before I could get back."

"I'll give you two to one I wouldn't—for fifty, say. Look—I've got two, three inches of fat padding me. I won't bleed much."

Knowles shook his head. "It's not necessary. If we keep quiet, there's air enough here for several days."

"It's not the air, Mr. Knowles. Noticed it's getting chilly?"

I had noticed, but hadn't thought about it. In my misery and funk, being cold didn't seem anything more than appropriate. Now I thought about it. When we lost the power line, we lost the heaters, too. It would keep geting colder and colder . . . and colder.

Knowles saw it, too. "Okay, Fats. Let's get on with it."

I sat on the suit while Konski got ready. After he got his pants off, he snagged one of the tag-alongs, burst it, and smeared the sticky insides on his right buttock. Then he turned to me. "Okay, kid—up off the nest."

We made the swap-over fast, without losing much air, though the leak hissed angrily. "Comfortable as an easy chair, folks." He grinned.

Knowles hurried into the suit and left, taking the light with him. We were in darkness again.

AFTER a while Konski said, "There's a game we can play in the dark, Jack. You play chess?"

"Why, yes—play at it, that is."

"A good game. Used to play it in the decompression chamber when I worked under the Hudson. Twenty on a side, to make it fun?"

"Okay." He could have said a thousand; I didn't care.

"Fine. King's pawn to king three."

"Uh—king's pawn to king four."

"Conventional, aren't you? Puts me in mind of a girl I knew in Hoboken. . . ." What he told about her had nothing to do with chess, although it did prove she was conventional, in a manner of speaking. "King's bishop to queen's bishop four. Remind me to tell you about her sister. Seems she hadn't always been a redhead, but she wanted people to think so. So she— Sorry. Go ahead with your move."

My head was spinning. "Queen's pawn to queen three."

"Queen to king's bishop three. Anyhow, she—" He went on, in detail. It wasn't new and I doubt it ever happened to him, but it cheered me up. I actually smiled, there in the dark. "Your move."

"Oh." I couldn't remember the board. I

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decided to get ready to castle, safe enough in the early game. "Queen's knight to queen's bishop three."

"Queen advances to capture your king's bishop's pawn. Checkmate. You owe me twenty, Jack."

"Huh? Why, that can't be!"

"Want to run over the moves?" he asked, and he checked them off.

I managed to visualize them, then said, "I'll be a dirty name! You hooked me with a fool's mate!"

He chuckled. "You should have kept your eye on my queen instead of on the redhead."

I laughed. "Know any more stories?"

"Sure." He told me another. But when I urged him to go on, he said, "I think I'll rest a little while, Jack."

"You all right, Fats?"

He didn't answer; I got up and felt my way over to him in the dark. His face was cold and he didn't speak when I touched him. I could hear his heart faintly by pressing an ear to his chest, but his hands and feet were like ice.

I had to pull him loose; he was frozen to the spot. I could feel the ice, though I knew it must be blood. I started rubbing him, but the hissing of the leak brought me up short. I tore off my own trousers, had a panicky time of it before I found the exact spot in the dark, and sat down, with my right buttock pressed against the leak.

It grabbed at me like a suction cup, icy cold. Then it was fire spreading through my flesh. After a time I couldn't feel anything at all, except a dull ache and weariness. . . .

There was a light somewhere. It flickered on, then went out again. I heard a door clang.

"Knowles!" I screamed. "Mr. Knowles!"

The light flickered on again. "Coming, Jack—"

I started to blubber. "Oh, you made it! You made it!"

"No, I didn't, Jack. I couldn't pass the next section. When I got back to the lock, I passed out." He stopped to wheeze. "There's a crater—" The light flickered off and fell clanging to the floor. "Help me, Jack," he said querulously. "Can't you see I need help? I tried to—"

I heard him stumble and fall. I called to him, but he didn't answer.

I tried to get up, but I was stuck fast, a cork in a bottle. . . .

I came to, face down, with a clean sheet under me. "Feeling better?" It was Knowles, standing by my bed, dressed in a bathrobe.

"You're dead," I told him.

"Not a bit." He grinned. "They got to us in time."

"What happened?" I stared at him, still not believing my eyes.

"Just like we thought—a crashed rocket. An unmanned mail rocket got out of control and hit the tunnel."

"Where's Fats?"

"Hi!"

I twisted my head around; it was Konski, face down like myself.

"You owe me twenty," he said cheerfully.

"I owe you—" I found I was dripping tears for no good reason. "Okay, I owe you twenty. But you'll have to come to Des Moines to collect it." ■ ■ ■

VERY DEAD HEAT!

By Hugh Pentecost

. He expected that broken-down bangtail. Sockomo, to lose and take him to the cleaner's . . . What he didn't expect was for Sockomo to win, and take him to the undertaker's. . . .

Don't miss this thrill-packed novelette in the big June issue! Together with entertaining short stories and crime fact features, it makes a banner issue for the most discriminating detective reader. You will find your favorite authors here—Donald Barr Chidsey, Stuart Friedman, Philip Ketchum, Fletcher Flora, and others.

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NEW DETECTIVE MAGAZINE 25c

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"You are too high," the unknown officer's voice told him. "Let down fifty feet, quick."

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It was a voice that could never come from living lips, "talking him in" to that perilous landing. . . . The same voice he had last heard in choked, violent anger, bitterly promising—

I'LL TAKE CARE OF YOU

By Oliver La Farge

TOMMY SAUNDERS was too well educated to give in easily to superstition. His job was to keep navigating, especially when it looked as if his plane would have to drop out of formation; it was up to him to give the pilot the shortest, straightest line to where they might expect to pick up fighter cover. He had plenty to do, but from the time after that big burst of flak when the bombardier went down and the right inboard engine began to give trouble, he kept thinking of Bronc Miller and in a broken, interrupted, exclamatory way trying to explain to him. As Bronc was dead, that was the purest superstition. For various reasons Tommy was much more frightened than he should have been, so that he did not fully realize what he was doing.

Bronc Miller and Tommy had become the closest kind of friends in Pilot Training School. You would not have picked them as a pair to team up together, but they did. Tommy was of medium height, slender, rather shy, an Easterner and a good deal of a bookworm. After the war he planned to go back to college and wind up with a Ph. D. Bronc (he got his name at training school) was right out of the West, a rangy, tall man with wide shoulders, fair, slow-spoken and slow-moving. The slowness was deceptive; he could be quicker than a sidewinder when he wished. He seldom read a book. After the war he was going to finish college to please his old man, and after that he'd join him in running the ranch.

Bronc liked Tommy's thoughtful ways. Tommy felt less shy when he and the big fellow were together. They had important things in common, too. Their parents had raised them to dislike foul talk, and when they dated girls they liked to find the kind of girls with whom they acted just as they would with the girls at home. They were, as Tommy put it one time, anti-wolf. Whatever the reasons, by the time they finished Basic they were inseparable, and when, near the end of Primary, Tommy was washed out, Bronc minded it almost as much as he did.

There was no danger of Bronc's washing out. He was a good soldier and a natural pilot; all he needed was to pile up enough flying time and he would be one of the great pilots. He went on through Advanced, and then he was shipped to Waltham Field where they were forming B-17 squadrons for what was to become the Eighth Air Force.

Tommy's record showed advanced work in mathematics. With a little managing and some help from his C.O., who liked him and was sorry to wash him out, he got into navigators' school. There he was in his element, and that way he got his wings. By then, of course, Bronc was months ahead of him. They had kept in touch right along. When Tommy got orders for Waltham Field he felt that the breaks were really coming away. He didn't warn Bronc: he waited in the officers' club that first evening until Bronc came in, then he walked up to him and said, "Hello, stranger."

Bronc never batted an eye. He just said, "You aren't going to like it here." Then they shook hands and went to the bar for a beer.

Waltham Army Air Base, to give it its full title, is now Maryburg Municipal Airport, with a scheduled traffic of four DC-3's a day. The runways seem too big, there's grass coming up along some of the parking strips, a lot of the buildings have been sold as war surplus. The glory is gone. Maryburg is a nice little town--two DC-3 stops a day northbound, two a day southbound, that size of town. The houses stood in their own yards, and people sat out on the porches when the weather was good. Throwing all these airmen in, all of a sudden, crowded the place. The inhabitants were not entirely happy about their visitors.

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some of them were pretty rough, but a man in uniform who behaved himself generally got a decent deal. There are all kinds of people in any town, but take them by and large, the people of Maryburg appreciated what these boys were doing.

Bronc had made friends in town. He dated with a girl called Betsy Harrison, and Betsy had a friend, Martha Gavin, who teamed up with them to make a foursome. Tommy owned a car, which helped a lot. Martha was on the blonde and bright side; Betsy was a brunette, rather quiet of manner with a fine streak of humor under that. She had a lovely, regular profile and an enchanting smile. If anything, you would have figured that Betsy was right for Tommy, Martha for Bronc, but they divided up the other way. They went dancing a lot. When they took their girls home, each of them kissed his girl good night, but that was all there was of that.

Two months after Tommy arrived, Bronc's squadron was moved out. It got one of those stupid, unnecessary deals that were so common in the Army, cooked up usually by someone who wasn't involved himself and thought it was fine and military to be in a hurry. They pulled the boys out of bed in the middle of the night and told them to get packed, they were leaving at 0600, and there would be no communicating with anyone. Even Tommy knew nothing about it till he went to breakfast.

He went to see Betsy that evening, to let her know what had happened. There was nothing special between her and Bronc, but they were real friends, and naturally she would be upset at having him pulled out like that. She'd been surprised when Tommy telephoned, saying he wanted to give her some news, and having learned a little about life in the Army air forces by then, had a pretty good hunch what it would be.

When Tommy had told her, she asked, "Where are they going? Or can't I ask that?"

"It's no secret that we're training for the ETO here," he said.

The Americans were just beginning daylight bombing over France and Holland then and the first newspaper stories had been printed.

"He'll be flying over Europe pretty soon then?"

"Not for a while. They get a lot of transition training in U.K. first."

"I wish he didn't have to go. I wish none of you had to go. They say—in the papers—that it's a successful raid if casualties are under five per cent. If one man in twenty is killed." Her voice dropped on the last words.

Tommy improvised fast. "Oh, no, that includes the wounded. There are always a lot more of those." It was five per cent of aircraft lost, actually.

"I shouldn't have said that. You'll be going over, too." She put her hand on his a moment. He felt something disturbing and surprising.

"Who knows? They may keep us here until we rot. You can't tell."

"Tommy, I never could ask Bronc, somehow—don't you worry about it?"

"Yes, I worry about it." He spoke slowly, thinking. He was a person who would have to imagine forward. "I figure—it's like the weather. Lots of the time we don't like the weather, but long ago we learned to take it as it comes. Well, that's the way this is. All you can do is relax and let whatever is going to happen, happen. It's a funny thing; you're being trained to do about the most positive and deadly thing on earth, and the first thing you have to learn, so that you can stay with it, is to be sort of negative. Not about the job itself, of course, but—well—" He made a broad gesture. "About things in general."

They talked awhile about other matters, then they went over to Martha's. It was the middle of the week and he had a heavy schedule on, so he took Betsy home early. Driving back to the field he wondered, alarmed, whether he was falling in love with her, and with that fell to searching his mind to make sure of what he believed Bronc felt about her, or rather, what he didn't feel.

They had a new co-pilot on his ship, an agreeable, cheerful fellow, new to the field and to Maryburg. Tom brought him along next Saturday. He turned out to be an excellent dancer. He wound up paired off with Martha, Tom with Betsy, without anything being said by anyone. It was in the course of that evening, dancing with her so much more than he ordinarily did, that Tommy knew for sure that he was in love with the dark-haired girl. It was as if so long as Bronc was around he had been unable to see, not the girl, but into himself. Now all of a sudden he saw. A couple of days after that he got Bronc's temporary APO address and wrote to him, but he didn't say anything about this new feeling; it was too new and too impossible.

WITH Betsy, especially when he was alone with her, his shyness returned. It didn't seem as if he already knew her well, had danced and traded jokes with her; she was someone else now, the most important person in the world. He noticed intensely how she looked at different times; tricks of her voice, the way she touched her upper lip with her forefinger when she was thinking. He

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found these details painfully beautiful, and at some particular look or gesture or turn of voice he'd become speechless. Sometimes he was tongue-tied, sometimes quicker of speech and mind than ever.

A couple of weeks after that his Group C.O. had an attack of militaryitis with the immediate result that the co-pilot pulled Commander of the Guard and had to pass up a date. Martha chose to drop out, so Tommy took Betsy out, alone. He was delighted to have her to himself, then he lost his confidence and, fatally, he thought of Bronc, self-assured, always easy and with something pleasant to say. That sank him, so that for the first part of the evening he could feel and hear himself being dull and stiff. At one point he caught her looking at him with a funny half smile and a soft expression he did not understand in her eyes. He wanted to grab her up right then and there and hold her close to him.. clear off the floor. Their dancing filled in the silences, and dancing they were good together. Later he forgot himself, and they had some serious, absorbed talk about after the war and what they wanted from life. He felt as happy as a man in his stage of being in love can feel.

He drove her home and saw her to her porch steps. When she turned to say good night to him, she seemed expecting to be kissed. so, hesitantly, he did kiss her. It began as one of those friendly kisses, his hands resting lightly on her arms, her hands barely touching his blouse. then it took fire, their arms went around each other, and the kiss went on for a long time. When they drew back, without a word said, they sat down together on the porch steps. and he took her hands in his.

The silence lasted some time while he collected himself. Then he said, "Betsy, we've been seeing each other for nearly three months. Not every day, of course. Anyhow, do you think you know me well enough to know whether you could marry me?"

"I think I do."

"Well, then, do you think you could?"

She drew in a little breath; then she said softly, "I think it would work."

It wasn't until the next day that they realized what a flat answer to a proposal hers had been. Then it became a joke with them, one of those private sayings that get established in a family.

Betsy's parents took the news cheerfully. They liked the young man, he came of a solid family, and his post-war plans were good. Everyone agreed on a short engagement. Tommy's parents came to Maryburg for the wedding. Afterward, the couple got four days' honeymoon, then set up housekeeping in two rooms at the back of the Harrison's house. As things went around Army posts in those days, they were well off.

Tommy wrote to Bronc about his engagement right after he wrote to his parents, as soon as he had recovered from his first daze. He told him, as he would not have told anyone else, how strange and wretched it was to marry like this when you were expecting to be sent far away any day, and how it affected his feelings about overseas duty, wanting it and dreading it.

They had had nearly three weeks of married life when Tommy got his orders. The Eighth Air Force had sent in a call for replacement navigators, and the finger was put on him. There was not the brutal suddenness Bronc encountered; he had a chance to say good-bye decently. Betsy was wonderful, she stayed cheerful, she was tender, she told him to hurry up and win the war so that they could set up housekeeping with a kitchen of their own. Her last word was a joke. Not that she fooled him, nor he her, for that matter, but it sent him on his way with a lift.

Going as replacements, he and six others from Waltham flew as passengers with A.T.C. They had a Number Two Priority, and as they encountered good weather all the way, they found themselves unloading at Waring-Tenley Field in England, their new base, at one o'clock one morning, thirty-two hours after they had left Waltham, all but four of which had been spent in bucket seats. They were hungry and groggy for sleep. They were taken to their quarters to stow their bags, then to the mess hall to get some chow before they sacked in.

At that hour there were a lot of men in the mess hall, most of them in flying clothes, stowing away breakfast. They had the sleepy, alert look of men just getting up. A number of them stared at the six navigators when they came in. Seeing this group, all in rumpled, Class A uniforms, unshaven, all with the same wings, all second lieutenants, it was easy to spot them for newly arrived replacements. To make them feel at home, a number of men called, "You aren't going to like it here!"

The newcomers smiled tiredly and got in the chow line. Tommy's eyes were half open. He got his tray loaded and went to a table with his bunch. He did not see Bronc. Bronc saw him, and went right on eating.

When Bronc had lit his cigarette and finished off his coffee, he got up and came to Tommy's table. He looked big in his monkey suit. As he jumped up, Tommy saw that he was wearing sliver bars. He held out his hand and said, "Hello, stranger."

Bronc's hands stayed on his hips. "My pal.

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Waiting till I'm shipped and then stealing my girl. My pal."

"Bronc!"

"Cut it. We're due at briefing in about three minutes. I don't have time to talk now. I'll take care of you when I get back."

"But Bronc, I— My God—"

"I said cut it. Stow it." His eyes were alien, hostile. "My pal. Okay, pal, I'll take care of you." Then he said a strange thing, out of the early morning and the tension of the mission ahead, "If I come back or if I don't come back, I'll take care of you." He turned on his heels and left.

Tommy sat down. One of his companions said, "You're starting off right, huh? Was that his girl you married?"

Bronc didn't come back. That was the period when the Germans were learning to adapt their fighter distribution to the daylight bombing. No one can fly a plane with only one wing, they say. Bronc's went in over the target and the report was that the men on board never had a chance. Tommy felt awful. He had dreaded Bronc's return, but there had been the hope that to some extent he could straighten things out. Never to see him again, not to have that chance, was bad, and then there was the simple, desolate fact that Bronc was no longer on this earth. He wrote at some length to Bronc's family, and in another vein to Betsy, but he did not tell her that Bronc must have been in love with her after all. That would have to wait until he could, if he should be able to, tell her himself.

"I'll take care of you," Bronc had said, "If I come back *or if I don't.*" A strange thing to say. An educated man can believe no part of what that might imply, but with combat coming up and with all you learn of what happens after the formations take off, you have a feeling that you can't take chances on anything, believable or no. The memory of the tension of enmity in Bronc's eyes bothered him at moments; most of the time he just tended to his knitting.

His first mission was set up. At that time the Eighth Air Force had been robbed of P-38's, among other things, for the campaigns in North Africa and Italy. Missions were going well into France and Holland, without longe-range fighter support. The last part of the run to the targets and the first part of the return were accomplished without escort, and even with the bombers going out in fairly large formations, the practice was proving expensive. Tommy sat in his place in the nose of his B-17, back of the bombardier, strung up like the rest of them, thinking sometimes about Betsy but also thinking too much about Bronc.

The diversionary sweeps must have drawn off the Germans, for interception to and over the target was light. Flak over the target was moderately heavy and it was from that, turning after the bomb run, that they caught it. The bombardier simply keeled over, and the engine started acting up. Tommy gave the bombardier first aid. He was destined to give a lot of first aid that trip. The engine got rougher and rougher, until, about a hundred miles from the coast, the pilot feathered the prop. After that they had to fall out of formation.

The coast came into sight. The pilot, Judson, asked Tommy where they were. Tommy told him. Jud said, "Where the hell are our fighters? Wouldn't you think they'd wait around for us?" Then the turret gunner reported four fighters coming in from high up at two o'clock. They hoped they might be part of the cover, but they turned out to be ME-110's. They peeled off and attacked from ahead, which was the approved tactic with the Germans at that time. On three engines, there isn't very much to be done about evasive action.

Tommy thought they got one with the forward guns and the turret gunner claimed one definitely, but the Germans raised hell with the flight deck. They made only the one pass, then a formation of Spitfires turned up, coming from the coast. Tommy heard Jud call him on the intercomm, so he came up. The co-pilot was out, rocking in his seat and held by the strap, and the side of Jud's face was all over blood. Further back, Sparks was on the floor. He looked dead, and he was. The flight engineer was working overtime, checking on the three good engines.

"Look after Bill first," Jud said.

TOMMY let the co-pilot onto the floor and did what he could for him. Then he did his best for Jud's head. Jud was white as a sheet where he wasn't covered with blood.

"You've done some flying," he said. "You'll have to take over a little while. I've got her on George. I've given her a lot of trim tab. Keep the left wing down. Lemme out of this."

He fumbled with his safety belt buckle. Tommy undid it for him and eased him, too, to the floor. He fixed him up as well as he could. Then he took the left hand seat. He checked with the crew on the intercomm, telling them what the score was. One waist gunner had been hit in the leg, not seriously, the others were all right.

They were over the water, with the Spitfires still covering them. He was all right flying her on the automatic pilot, but he didn't

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think Jud would be able to take over when it came time to bring her down. Tommy had held the stick occasionally in straight and level flight, and of course he had watched plenty of landings. Jud began moaning. That settled it. He told the engineer, "Give him a shot."

The engineer got the morphine syrette out of the first aid kit and used it as he had been told.

On the intercomm, Tommy said, "Navigator to crew, attention please. I am going to try to bring her in. The biggest thing I ever landed was a PT-19, and I washed out on that. Those of you who aren't hurt had better get ready to bail out."

The tail gunner said, "My parachute's shot up. I'll walk, Loot."

The turret gunner said, "Do you think you can make it?"

"I'm certainly going to try."

"Let's all ride together."

The others agreed.

He corrected their heading to aim for a field nearer to the English coast than Waring-Tenley. If Sparks had been alive, he'd have him in touch with the field by now. As it was, he broadcast on voice communication, hoping he could get something on his frequency. The Spits shot on ahead of him, presumably running low on fuel. He didn't like seeing them go.

The picture of Bronc's hostile eyes came vividly to him. He did not try to explain to him any more; he was too angry, profoundly, killingly angry, at what had happened to the four men near him, for that.

He got a beacon which seemed right for the field he was aiming for, and homed on that. As he crossed the coast, he broadcast harder than ever, "Sugar three seven nine to Lover, Sugar three seven nine to Lover, come in, Lover."

"Lover to Sugar three seven nine!" It was a Wac's voice, and how glad he was to hear it. "Come in Sugar three seven nine."

"I am on three engines." He did not waste time on the usual repetitious identifications. "I have another one that doesn't look too good. I am heading three hundred twenty-five degrees, homing on your beacon, just crossing the coast. My pilot and co-pilot are out, this is the navigator flying the plane. I say again, the navigator is flying the plane. I have five wounded aboard. I am going to try for a landing. Do you hear me?"

The Wac replied. "Lover to Sugar three seven nine. I hear you badly. Do you hear me?" She was still observing the formalities.

"I hear you faintly. I have picked up an N signal, is it yours? Over."

"That is ours. Bear right for the beam. Over."

"Please get someone to talk me in. I have never landed one of these damned things before. Over."

"You are cleared for emergency landing. We are sending for a pilot. Have you found our beam?"

"Hold on, sister. Stand by."

He adjusted the nobs, swinging to the right. Shortly he caught in his earphones the solid buzz where the A and N beams overlap, "the beam".

"Sugar three seven nine to Lover. I am on your beam. Over."

"We have sent for a pilot to talk you in." She had said that before. "Come in on the beam at five thousand—"

The voice was cut off. He called, "Lover, I do not hear you. Do you hear me? Come in, Lover. Sugar three seven nine to Lover, come in, Lover."

The silence lasted for an eternity which was probably three minutes. He and the flight engineer fiddled futilely with the earphones and the wires. He could not hear the beam any longer, but his direction finder was still working.

Then a man's voice came in, calm and steady.

"Sugar three seven nine, do you her me now?"

"I hear you."

"Do you know how to uncage and go back on manual?"

"Yes."

"Then do so, but take her off trim tabs first and correct for your missing engine with left rudder. Over."

He could spot the field ahead now. How did whoever was talking to him know that he was on automatic and that Jud had given her a lot of trim tab? Guessed, he supposed. The voice had been calming, steady, unworried, familiar.

He visualized a colonel, with a thousand hours and command pilot's wings.

"Sugar three seven nine, are you on manual?"

"I am."

"Come down to two thousand feet and pass over the tower. Turn to your downwind leg at one ninety degrees as soon as you are over the tower. Keep your airspeed, you can't get it back if you should have to go round again. When you are over the tower turn to one ninety degrees and drop to fifteen hundred feet. Repeat."

He repeated, and added, "My airspeed is one hundred thirty miles per hour." He was

(Continued on page 113)

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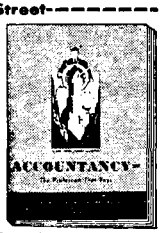

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FAMOUS FANTASTIC MYSTERIES

(Continued from page 8)

FAN VET CONVENTION

The *2nd Annual Fan-Vet Convention* will be held in New York City on Sunday, April 20, 1952!

The convention is sponsored by the *Fantasy Veterans Association* for the purpose of obtaining funds to keep the fans and readers of science fiction supplied with stf magazines while they're in the Armed Forces of the United States for the year 1952-53. The Association has been mailing to the fans and readers stationed in Korea and Europe packages of stf magazines, including *Famous Fantastic Mysteries* ever since the war broke out in Korea in 1950 and money is needed for this and other services until the boys come home once again.

The convention will be held at Werdermann's Hall, 3rd Avenue and E. 16th Street, New York City, on Sunday, April 20, at 1 P.M. An excellent fantasy movie will be shown; many editors, among them, Sam Mines, Jerry Bixby, Mary Gnaedinger, Charles Hornig, Mort Weisinger, will be there. Numerous artists and authors of the stf field have also promised to attend. Well-known fans and readers of stf will also be there. There is no admission fee, there will be no collection, we ask you one and all to attend and enjoy yourself for an afternoon of stf pleasure. We will have an auction, and here's where we hope to make a modest profit so that the *Fan-Vets* can continue for another year in supplying stf needs to the boys and gals in the Armed Forces. Many rare items will be put up for auction, cover paintings and interiors of your favorite artists, old magazines and those rare items you'll want for your collection.

For more complete details and up-to-the-minute news of this gala convention send a post card to our Convention Chairman, Ray Van Houten 127 Spring Street, Paterson 3, New Jersey.

For those of you who may not be able to come to the Convention, but want to help, we need used copies of current stf magazines, which will be sent overseas to our boys and gals in Service; we need the names and latest address of stf fans in the Armed Forces, so that we can contact them to see what aid we can be to them, and good hard cash, so that we can do all that's mentioned above.

Thank you and hoping to see most of you at the *2nd Fan-Vet Convention*.

Sincerely,
JAMES V. TAURASI,
Acting National Commander.

137-03 32nd Ave..
Flushing 54, N. Y.

MORE FROM GILBERT COLLINS

I received another letter from Gilbert Collins today and I have made a copy of it for you.

Dear Jim Fleming:

This is what we call Boxing Day, a public holiday in England, and as I shall be returning to the office tomorrow, I am taking this opportunity of telling you that I received your long and very interesting letter of Ocober 11, and also your most

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kind letter of December 14th, which arrived yesterday morning; and that I have found both letters very stimulating indeed.

I should have used the early part of the Christmas holiday to write to you, but wanted first of all to deal with a long and important letter in German for my firm, who get a certain amount of foreign correspondence with which I am asked to deal. Up to the present there has been correspondence in French, German and Spanish; if any further comes in Italian or Russian, I shall tackle it for them, but beyond that, they will have to send the letters out to a firm of translators. They can at any rate hardly complain that my range is limited, as nobody else in the firm appears to know any European languages at all.

Now as to your letters. I am keeping these by me as there is a lot in them which I shall not be able to answer today, though you may trust me to do my best to clear up everything in time, and I shall certainly bear in mind your suggestions as to further developments of the Far Eastern mysteries. (I suggested that he write a sequel to "The Valley of Eyes Unseen" and use Crayton and Hope in it.—Jim F.) when the day comes for me to settle down once more to literary pursuits—which of course I have always regarded, and still regard, as my life-work.

You also ask how I began writing. In my boyhood I was greatly interested in classical Greek. Once a Master of Arts of the University of Oxford, with whom I was reading the Greek tragedians, told me that I was reading Euripides as fluently and as accurately as he could read it himself. I was proud of that, as I had not had anything like his advantages for learning Greek. The Greeks taught the arts to Europe, and their successors, the Romans, carried on the work. The Romans had a favorite phrase, *limae labor*. It means "the labour of the file"; that is to say that when the sculptor has carved his statue he must still give it infinite polish if he wishes it to be a perfect work of art. It seemed to me that the modern style of literary work which required most *limae labor* was light verse.

The first notable practitioner in that form of art was the Roman poet Horace, who lived in the time of Christ. He has had successors all down through the centuries. The best modern exponents print their work in the famous English humourous weekly *Punch*. I wrote light verse for *Punch* from 1913 to 1919. As most of it dealt with my experiences in World War No. 1, and therefore had some sort of commemorative interest, I collected it into the little book called "Sidelights Of Song." That was dedicated to the Countess of Cavan, a very gracious lady who had entertained me at her country house at Wheathampstead, in Hertfordshire, when I had my anti-aircraft guns in the neighbourhood. (Her husband, the Earl of Cavan, was one of the best generals on the western front, and afterwards became Commander-in-Chief of the British forces in Italy—in fact, I was moving in quite distinguished circles along then, because the next job given to me was to take my guns up to Sandringham.

King George V was not in residence at the time, but I remember going up to the House to discuss defence arrangements with Col. Sir Arthur

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Davidson, the Equerry to Queen Alexandra, and I should have met the Dowager Queen had I stayed longer.

When I began to do longer work—short stories and novels—*limae labor* continued to be my art canon. I suppose the novel you have just read, "The Valley of Eyes Unseen," was written five times before I released the mss. to the publishers. Though possibly you did not realize it while reading the book, *limae labor* is why the thing moves forward so smoothly and graphically, and carries the reader on and on. I have known many people to read that book, but never one that did not say they could not put it down.

You ask which book of mine I consider best. Impossible to say, as one cannot match one *genre* with another. I should say the Valley is perhaps a shade better than Starkenden. Among my detective-thrillers—I have never written a detective story pure and simple, as I do not consider it a legitimate art form—I think "Death Meets the King's Messenger" was probably the best. It was published on your side of the Atlantic by Doubleday Doran, and they do not publish anything but the best.

The best straight thriller was "Horror Comes to Thripplands."

I will try to find you a copy of that some day; remind me, and also to give you a copy of the little firstborn "Sidelights," which must be very rare now, though there are one or two amongst my books down in Devonshire, I am certain, and it will be an interesting memento even if you are not interested in light verse. "The New Magic" was the best swimming book, and "Far Eastern Jaunts" was better than "Extreme Oriental Mixture."

With other writers' books I am similarly handicapped because my tastes are catholic. Among serious novelists I have long felt that Henry James was the greatest of them all. He was American born and American famous before he settled at Rye Sussex, England, and there wrote all his greatest work. "The American" is the supremest masterpiece of his wonderful art that I have come across. In humour, "Huckleberry Finn" is my vote for the world-beater, probably because Mark Twain was not only the greatest humorist of all time but one of the profoundest philosophers. Conan Doyle's "Study in Scarlet" (this is a Sherlock Holmes adventure—Jim F.) is the best detective-thriller I have ever read, and "Lot # 249" by the same author the best action fantasy—though it is only a long short story. Then again, Kipling could never write a supreme long novel, but his "Puck of Pook's Hill" and "Rewards and Fairies" are supreme as connected short stories. But if I were going to be marooned on a desert island and limited to one book, I should probably plump for Shakespeare or the Bible—probably the latter.

Do not be impatient to travel. Perhaps military service will take you roving some day. I moved heaven and earth to get to the western front in the first world-war but my medical category of B1 was against it. Then when I had hardly been demobilised a few months I was asked to go to China, and that was the beginning of all the Far Eastern saga.

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THE READERS' VIEWPOINT

And so, with all good wishes for the New Year, believe me,

Your friend,
Gilbert Collins.

So ends Collins' letter. It might be of interest to you to know that I have just ordered a copy of his book "Red Death." If it is fantasy I will let you know.

JIM FLEMING.

Box 173,
Sharon, Kansas.

COLLINS' STORY FINE

It was swell of F.F.M. to bring out the Feb. issue just before Christmas. (What better present could an F.F.M. fan get?)

Gilbert Collins' "The Valley Of Eyes Unseen" is a very fine adventure-tale. It was well-written, and its action was always moving at a steady pace. Collins can easily take his place beside Talbot Mundy: "The Devil's Guard," etc., and John Taine: "Purple Sapphire."

It was certainly gratifying to see F.F.M. change back to its old format. You know, I had really no objections to the smaller size other than the fact that the wonderful illustrations your magazine is so famous for were practically obliterated. It was the illustrations that gave the stories their flavor.

Everyone seems to have praised McClary's "Rebirth," so I might as well put my word in.

It was very well-written and had enough action to satisfy anyone. However, there are a few questions that come to my mind.

First, if the adult population of the world is brought back to a prenatal period, what effect does the ray have on children? (How far back in mind are they brought?)

And secondly, as in all stories that try to change and/or reform mankind the main fallacy here is that when we are "reborn" we must rely on the one thing that Man has when he is born, instinct. Without instinct we could not exist. Now, what is to prevent this new "Reborn" civilization from continuing its previous pattern of instinct: war. Merely blanking Man's mind back to infancy is not the answer. It does not change the instinctual mould. Man's instinct should have been changed, perhaps then we would have the kind of world we all want.

By the way, I recently read a wonderful story that would be perfect for F.F.M. It is W. L. George's "Children Of The Morning." Those who have read it feel just as I do: it is a classic.

Before closing, I'd like the fans to know that I have for sale a load of rare S.F. books and mags. (Send for a list, and kindly inclose a stamped self-addressed envelope.)

Among the books are: A mint copy of "The Weapon Makers," "Skylark Of Space," Buffalo Book Co. 1st, "Book of Miracles"—Ben Hecht—signed by him, and a fine copy of the first edition of "Gladiator"—Philip Wylie.

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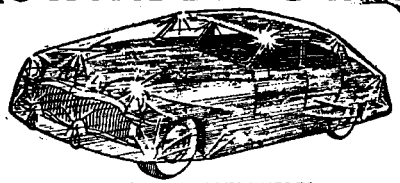

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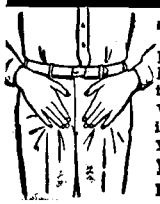

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FAMOUS FANTASTIC MYSTERIES

UTAH'S FIRST FANZINE

Please notice, all you fen, that Utah's first fanzine will continue bi-monthly through the year, at the end of which I hope to go monthly. The title of the fanzine is OOPSLA and is 10c per copy, 30c per half-year (3 issues) or 60c a year (for 6 issues and probably an annish.)

It will contain material by Lee Hoffman, Rog Phillips, Tom Covington, Shelby Vick and others. Why don't you try a sample copy at least? It's only a dime.

GREGG CALKINS.

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OUR NEW POET

As to myself, there isn't too much to say—I am seventeen years old, and am a senior in High school. I publish a paper of my own, the *Banner*, which is coming along nicely. I have been writing ever since I went to school. My first story, dealing with several semi-human creatures known as the Animal Boys, I developed into a book along about third grade. In fourth grade, I wrote a three hundred page volume of short stories, and followed it with another of the same length and content in fifth. In sixth, I wrote my first real novel, "Man of Space," written in vari-coloured partially illegible characters, and being something like five hundred pages in length, and then went away to a private school which kept me from my work for nearly two years. When I got back, I wrote a book of poetry entitled "The White Mantle," and another novel, "The Longest Journey."

Since then, I have been writing my school paper, and contemplating several other books, such as "The Temple of Rain," "Night of Triumph," and so forth. I enjoy writing; I love to watch my creations emerging in an embryonic state through the first draft; then, polishing them, I can observe their progress to a point as near to perfection as I can, at this time, lay a claim to. I am happy in my work; indeed, it is less work than it is play.

I have always been interested in science fiction; even as a child, when I had never heard the name, I always thought that there should be stories written about space ships, time machines, other world creatures, and all the other weirdlings which I had noticed in the Buck Rogers comic strip—but my reading was methodically supervised until I came of an age at which I could choose for myself. Since then, my literary tastes have become somewhat omnivorous, although, I must say, they tend slightly toward the morbidly fantastic, even weird.

All my bigger books have been science fiction; but they were not worth reading. I was merely teaching myself how to write; I still am. I have a vast amount of learning to do before I can even aspire to the starry positions I love to dream of.

I greatly appreciate your kindness.

LOUIS M. HOBBS.

Hyde Avenue Extension,
Ridgway, Penn.

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THE READERS' VIEWPOINT

INFINITY

Hail to the stumbling, feeble mind of man!
Hail to the dismal walls which so demark
His sorrow'd limitations; thus, his mind
Which staggers, yet, moves on, with epochs sealed,
And tumbles 'neath the vastity of time!
How can his genius plumb the infinite,
How will he mark the space beyond the stars
With trifling numbers, rising on and on,
Or vast infinitudes, which strain to meet
In falling, where his limitations cease?
Move not among the figures in the ink
Which weave a saga, broken at the end
Where every scientist, defeated, cries
Against the fate which hurled to him his brain—
Seek ye the answer in the scribbled verse,
Where true interpretation lies; not scrawled
In mystic symbols, dragging down the stars;
Here, woven with the craft of poet's art
Lies all the world's wisdom in a line:
"Science is art, and art is science; thus,
Art is the solitary quest of man."

LOUIS M. HOBBS.

Editor's Note: We have bought two poems by Mr. Hobbs which are being illustrated by Lawrence for a future issue. In the meantime we asked his permission to put this one in the readers' department with a letter (herewith).

LIKED REYNOLD'S "BLIGHT"

I've just finished reading the February issue of F.F.M. and feel inclined to comment on said issue. The novel, I enjoyed reading; it made nice entertainment. I particularly liked the author's style of writing—he seemed to blend the writing of that day with a more modern style. Did you notice the similarity between "The Valley of Eyes Unseen" and "The Valley of Silent Men"? I much prefer, though, to call the latter story the best. In fact, I consider it one of the greatest you ever published. Well, almost, at least.

"Blight" was a chiller. Brr! I really liked it.

I might as well mention a few stories I'd like to see published. You've given us Wells' "Time Machine," now why not "The Door in the Wall" which I consider the greatest fantasy Wells ever wrote. Also by Wells: "The Plattner Story," "Flowering of the Strange Orchid," "The Moth." And by Algernon Blackwood, "May Day Eve."

Your readers might be interested in a new fanzine being put out by Gregg Calkins, 930 Briarcliff Ave., Salt Lake City 16, Utah. It's called *Oopsla*, sells for ten cents a copy, bi-monthly, and the first ish should be out by the time this is printed. Re Jan Romanoff's abbreviation for fantasy "fts". Calkins is also a plugger for this term.

Before I go, a couple of plaintive queries. Why, oh why, did you revert to the untrimmed pulp size? And why didn't you have Finlay on the cover?

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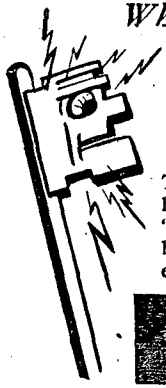

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FAMOUS FANTASTIC MYSTERIES

APPEAL FROM KOREA

There's a number of us fellows over here who enjoy Science Fiction. Has anyone some back issues of F.F.M. that they'd send? At least ten fellows will read every copy—old or new—that we receive.

SGT. ELMER BESHEARSE N625720113.
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FROM ANOTHER GOOD FRIEND

I have just finished reading your December issue of F.F.M. and enjoyed it so very much.

"The Gray Mahatma" was wonderful. I hope you will have more stories in your future issues just like it.

I have been a reader of your mags for just about a year.

I wonder if any of your readers have any old mags they don't want? I would be so pleased to have them.

Am the mother of five kiddies and my budget doesn't allow much for reading matter. I especially love to read at night when my family are all tucked in bed.

So, if any one of you kind people have any old magazines you don't want, I would so very much appreciate having them.

Sincerely yours in Fantasy,
MRS. J. LAING.

P. O. Box 654,
Brownfield, Texas.

LIKES OUR "VIEWPOINTS"

It is with some pleasure and a feeling of nostalgia that I am able to find an old friend in F.F.M. way down here beneath the sheltering palms of the Sunshine State. Outside of large metropolitan areas like Miami and Jacksonville, it's usually impossible to find any of the better stfantasy mags.

"The Readers' Viewpoint" is the first thing I always look forward to in F.F.M.; but why keep one of the top favorite s-f mag features so small?

To Jan Romanoff: how could "fts" ever be accepted as an abbreviation of the word *fantasy* when the abbreviation "stfantasy" already describes both forms of *science-fiction* and *fantasy* quite aptly?

Orville W. Mosher III: Any one with sufficient experience in stfantasy fandom need not trouble himself with a book to describe how the average fan-club best functions when a few poignant words can cover the entire picture in a nutshell, namely: *Blood, sweat and tears.*

I have several thousand stfantasy mags and books for trade or sale, but mostly for trade. Some of my mags go back to the '28 *Amazing, Science Wonder Quarterly*, and *Science Wonder Stories*, etc., with F.F.M. and F.N. back to '39, and hundreds of others to '51. Must request that fans list their wants to me as orderly as possible since it is imposible for me to keep a steady catalogue of mags even for two weeks. Also have two mint

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THE READERS' VIEWPOINT

d/w copies of Lovecraft's "Beyond the Wall of Sleep," and "The Outsider," both considered as the rarest items to collectors today. I'll trade and dispose of any of the above for other stfantasy mags from '23 to "modern times." Am interested in many books too. A three cent stamp will be appreciated in any correspondence with me though not necessary.

Best of luck to everyone,
CALVIN THOS. BECK.

Science Fantasy Service, Inc.,
P.O. Box 4155,
Jacksonville 1, Florida.

ORCHIDS TO HEINLEIN

This is my second letter to "The Readers' Viewpoint," and I want to thank you for printing the first one. I got quite a few nice letters from your F.F.M. fans.

I liked all the stories in 1951 except "Rebirth." It just didn't appeal to me.

"He Built a Crooked House" by Robert A. Heinlein was sure swell. I get dizzy even now when I think of it. Let's hear more of him in '52, eh? I think "Brood of the Witch Queen" by Sax Rohmer was Number 1. No. 2—"The Gray Mahatma" by Talbot Mundy. No. 3—"The Valley of Eyes Unseen. No. 4—"Weigher of Souls." No. 5—"Threshold of Fear." No. 6—"War of the Worlds." No. 7—"Rebirth." I wonder how many F.F.M. readers agree with me? Just keep them coming, Mary, this year like last, and I hope a lot of new readers get to reading F.F.M.. for they don't know what they are missing.

Well, I've wasted enough of your time with chit chat, so enclosed find money order for $1.50 for six more issues of F.F.M.

Fantastically Yours,
MRS. HAZEL I. TAYLOR.

Route 1, Box 15,
Big Rock, Tenn.

EXCELLENT FANTASY

"Valley of Eyes Unseen" was an excellent fantasy. Quite a far cry from "The Threshold of Fear." But let us not be concerned with detective stories. I gobble up as quickly as I can *all* reading material dealing with the Earth as it existed before man began to evolve from the apes, be it a geological history of that era or a story of a handful of poor people pitted against mighty prehistoric beasts on a lonely tropical isle. So please give us "The Lost World" by Conan Doyle.

I would also like to see "The Shunned House" and "The Lurking Fear," two Lovecraft masterpieces in F.F.M. Also, "The Snake Mother" and "The Black Wheel" by Merritt.

N. J. CLARKE.

23-28 Pine St.,
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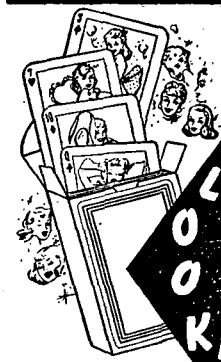

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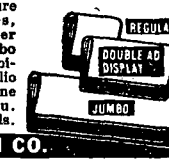

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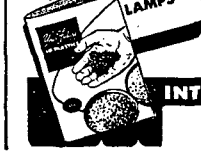

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FAMOUS FANTASTIC MYSTERIES

The lead novel, "The Valley of Eyes Unseen," is one which you don't pick up in its original form with ease, even in the most complete used-book stores, and was well worth twenty-five cents any day. And those Finlay interiors. Well, you just can't beat him; I hope you put out another *portfolio by him soon.*

Reynolds' short was real good, with a "clincher" ending, and Lawrence's illo was equal in quality.

Copella's abbreviation for fantasy "fts" seems to be all right. "Fts" seems to remind me of "fits," and "fits" in turn brings into mental intergration "mad" and anything that's mad is usually fantastic, so I guess it jibes all right. I'll try it on my fanspondents.

Concerning the contents of future issues, I feel that any more Merritt for a couple of years (except for his first one, "Through the Dragon Glass") is unwanted, as you have reprinted so much of him. The same goes for several of the other authors which have been reprinted. Most of the issues of F.F.M. are easily obtainable, if you go to the right places and have enough of that green stuff—say a couple of twenty dollar bills, for a starter.

Instead of such writers, I would suggest you get your material from sources really hard for the reader to get; like such zines as *Thrill Book* (I, at times, doubt its existence); *Strange Tales* (all I can find out is that it was published during the thirties and then folded after about eleven issues; by the way, there's a British zine of the same name, out about around '46 for a couple times); or *Tales of Mystery and Magic* (HPL did a neat short "Cool Air" in this one which was short-lived in the late twenties).

These mags are as hard to get as the October, 1912, *All Story* (where E.R.B.s first yarn appeared), maybe even more so. Or you can revert back to stuff in old *All Story, Cavalier, Argosy* and *Adventure.* I really liked the "Gray Mahatma" by Talbot Mundy, too. I hear H.P.L. did a book entitled "The Shunned House" in 1928. There's a "posthumous" novelette of the same title in October, 1937, *Weird Tales.* If you could dig up any of the yarns printed in that volume, they would be a hit (as if all the other H.P.L. tales printed in F.F.M. aren't).

Keep up the good fts.

Horrifically,
DAVID RIKE.

Box 203,
Rodeo, Calif.

"A YEAR OF PLEASANT READING"

I want to thank you for a year of very pleasant reading. I was very much pleased with the return to the old format, and the only thing to make my joy complete would be to see the old flash on the cover again.

To those who need them, I have magazines and books for sale or trade. A stamped, self addressed envelope will bring you the list.

I am asking thirty-five cents for these mags.

JAMES MOORE.

Route 2, Box 110,
Morganton, N. C.

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I'LL TAKE CARE OF YOU

(Continued from page 103)

beginning to feel a certain assurance—if only Bronc didn't intervene.

"Barometric pressure is twenty-nine point seventy-one. Repeat."

He repeated and corrected his altimeter. As he turned on the downwind leg the voice gave him his wind velocity and direction and the rest of the information. It went on, describing three-engine procedure as if they were having a conversation in an officers' club, but speaking extremely clearly, each word unforgettable. He would keep more airspeed than usual until he was surely ready to land, and he would use no flaps. When he began to horse back on his throttles and lose speed after he turned in from his base leg, he must let up proportionately on his rudder.

Tommy had signaled the engineer into the co-pilot's seat. The man knew enough to perform some of the co-pilot's functions. He, too, was listening to the instructions. As Tommy turned on the base leg, the voice said: "A B-Seventeen is about the most buoyant plane there is; she's still a honey on three engines, she'll fly on two." The unknown officer continued talking him in, step by step. It was almost as if he could see into the cockpit, like flying a two-place trainer with the instructor sitting behind you. Tommy supposed that an experienced man could tell a lot about what was happening just from watching the altitude of the plane.

He lined up the runway. The engineer reported:

"Landing gear is down and locked."

Tommy kept reporting his airspeed. The voice told him he was too high, to let him down fifty feet quick. Again, as if he could read the instruments. Tommy began to believe that he would make it, that he had Bronc licked after all. "Keep her nose up," the voice said, still calm, but with urgency. "That's right." He touched down, bumped, touched again. "Get your foot off that rudder!"

He was on the runway, now. "Cut!" He cut. The plane still ran under its own momentum, the crash trucks and ambulance racing for it. Tommy was drenched with sweat. The engineer took his earphones off and let out a long breath.

Tommy heard a chuckle, a chuckle that he could not fail to recognize. "I told you I'd take care of you, didn't I, Tommy?" the voice said. "From where I sit now, things look different than they did where you are. Betsy's a swell gal and she surely loves you; you take care of her." ■ ■ ■

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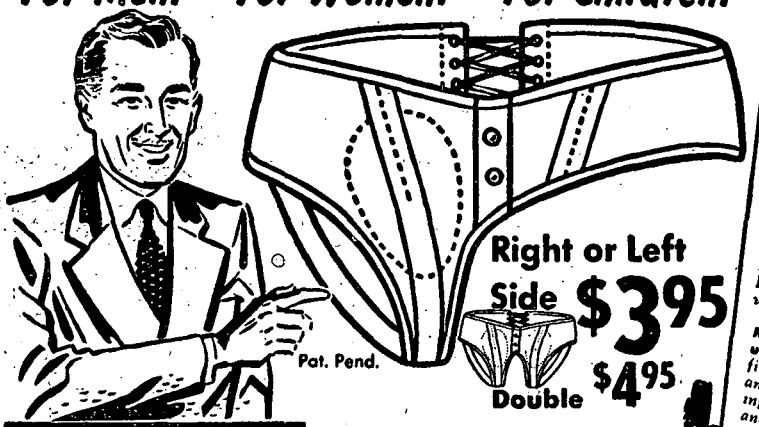

Pat. Pend.

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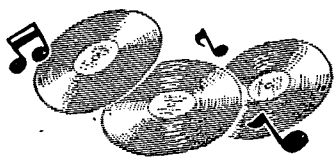

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It Is No Secret
May The Good Lord Bless and Keep You
Mr. Moon
Give Me More, More, More
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I Wanna Play House With You
Hey, Good Lookin'

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Mom And Dad's Waltz

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What a Friend We Have In Jesus
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In The Garden
Faith Of Our Fathers
There Is Power In The Blood
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Trust On Me
Jesus Keep Me Near The Cross
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May The Good Lord Bless And Keep You

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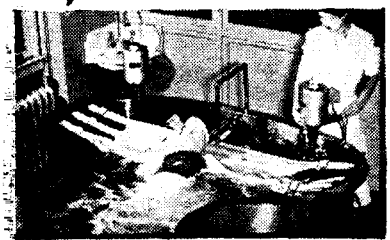
LOSS OF HANDS, EYES, FEET



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